The FLYING KESTREL

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THE FLYING KESTREL

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BY

CAPTAIN DINGLE

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THE FLYING KESTREL

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE *KESTREL'S* FLIGHT

HOMEWARD she flew. A stately ship, all sculptured ivory in the sun. Gleaming with golden tints at the shadow edges; glossy of hull, because of distance. Flirting the sprays about her head; trampling down the broken seas at her quarters; leaning, bowing, soaring; thrumming with the wind's strong stress, piling foam at her forefoot, speeding homeward, with the harbor headlands in sight.

A fierce weight was in the gale, for all that it blew out of a smiling blue sky, with never a fleck of cloud to feather the sunlight. It drove the old *Kestrel* roaring along at a speed that must have caused a good many pairs of eyes to blink aboard the two big modern steamers which shared the glinting picture with her. Thick smoke poured from the funnels of those steamers. The white water at their sharp stems rose higher. A broadening of their wakes told of increased speed and a determination to show the ancient clipper something about steam. And still the sailing ship sped serenely on, without fuss or smoke, without visible perturbation indicative of straining for speed; but inexorably passing the steamers, leaving them astern of her in full sight of the harbor heads, and the pilot boat standing out to meet all three. She looked like a toy of rosy

tinted ivory, delicately carved and set against a background of blue satin, a thing of sheer loveliness compared with the grim and sturdy materialism of those two steam freighters. And for once, beauty outpaced prosaic utility.

That was the *Kestrel* from the outside. She was one of the last survivors of a mighty line; the darling of deep-water sailormen almost half a century before. What power within her old bulwarks was it that could still call forth the magic her builders had hidden within her swift shapeliness? The chagrin those steamer men had doubtless experienced could be attributed to no less than a crew of supermen aboard the flying *Kestrel.*

Within, the old clipper did not look so magnificent. There was an aged look about her stanchions and scarred decks. But the stanchions were clean scraped and oiled. The scarred decks were white as shark's teeth. The masts were dark with age; but they stood like trees against the support of rigid, flawless rigging. The lofty royals seemed ready to burst with wind. The slender spars looked about to crack under the terrific stress that was driving the old ship to a mad speed that conquered steam. Along some of the planks the calking could be seen working, as if the harassed hull was at the limit of endurance, on the point of falling apart.

And the crew. At the pump amidships a sullen gang labored without enthusiasm, but with very complete efficiency. The green water gushed from

the pump lips at each clanking stroke of the brakes; and a scowling mate pumped with the gang. Leaning against the fiferail, dripping with sweat, another gang headed by another mate recovered breath to pump again. Water poured over their bare feet and spouted from the lee scuppers; water, flirted up by heavier sprays to windward, sluiced over the forecastle head and joined the rest in the waterways. Nobody among the double pump gangs had time or inclination to watch the glorious fight the *Kestrel* was making against the steamers. Those who saw anything at all saw the pilot schooner standing out to meet them, and judged therefrom how many more spells would be needed at the pumps.

At a red-curtained porthole in the break of the poop, facing the main deck, a small, bright-eyed, wild, brown face looked out at the gushing water. It was a girl's face, an Eastern girl's face, and in it was the look of a child prematurely initiated into all the mysteries of life. There was a half-savage timidity, and knowledge, and fear.

Above the porthole, beyond her vision, stood a man. He glanced at the steamers dropping astern; he glanced at the pilot vessel; and he scowled at the toiling men. He was unlovely and dour until he swept his glance aloft and around his ship. Then something human shone in his haggard, embittered face. There was pride, and fellowship, and utter understanding in his glance. To see him gently pat the teakwood poop rail, to hear him murmur croon-

ing words to the ship as she hurled the seas behind her, was to get a glimpse of a man who had no share in the ownership of the exterior man.

The seaman at the wheel wore a bandage about his head. He wore an empty knife-sheath too. But he regarded the skipper's back as if he were ready to attack him armed with nothing but the empty sheath.

The *Kestrel's* master nodded heavily. In his eyes was the weariness of death. He shook his head, like a fighter almost out who sees an opponent slithering toward him with the finishing punch ready; and the men at the pumps slackened speed, casting appraising looks aft. The mates gave but scant attention to them, for both were attentively regarding the pilot boat, now so near. One of the steamers began to creep ahead; and as if no weariness could utterly numb the brain within the master's skull, there rang out from the nodding figure a metallic shout which electrified the pumping gang and made the helmsman stiffen at his wheel.

"Pump and empty her, you sullen swine! Where's the mate? Mister, if you're bent on sinking my ship, step up here and tell me! Relieve the pumps, you skulkers; and the rest o' you get the three skysails set. D'ye hear me?"

As if released by springs the two mates sprang to obey, cursing bitterly under their breath. The weary gang at the pumps let go, and the rested gang stepped in their places. The water gushed

more copiously. The released men trooped at the heels of the mates, some clearing the skysail gear, three scampering aloft to loose the flimsy sails. And each and every man had a separate curse to lay on the man at the poop rail.

"He is not a man! He is the devil's father!"

"Soor! My knife is thirsty!" muttered a lean Lascar.

"There is yet time before we anchor, to pay all scores," crooned a loose skinned little Bengali who had joined the ship in full flesh. Dyak, Lascar, Bengali, Greek; rakings and scrapings of the Eastern ports; full of sour hate, seething with bitter memories; all willing to rend the haggard man at the poop rail; all waiting for a leader. Even the mates leaned toward the side of the men; but 'Frisco was in sight, the pilot boat was almost within hail, they could endure. The men climbing aloft to the skysail yards slowed in their ascent, for none believed that the master meant to pass the pilot schooner. Why hurry, when as soon as the skysails were set they must be furled again? Besides, from their superior altitudes they could see the helmsman nervously fidgeting at the wheel, licking his dry lips, glowering at the back of the master.

"Will you get those sails set?" shouted the master, and the very timbre of the voice goaded the men to speed again. The pumps clanked faster; the mates bawled louder; the men at the mastheads scampered up the slender bare poles to the skysail

yards as three pistol shots spat out and three heavy bullets whanged past three startled heads.

Abeam the fastest steamer forged through the seas at fourteen knots, the sea abreast of her all black with heavy smoke. The pilot schooner edged up closer to the wind, her small boat overboard, all ready to put off for the flying *Kestrel,* and the pilots aboard of her were evidently in a quandary as to what the big square rigger meant to do, since men were aloft aboard of her and instead of taking in sail seemed about to set more.

The helmsman left the wheel, glowering at the skipper's back. And as if the superhuman vitality that had kept him alert hitherto was redoubled in this last emergency, the master swung around at the same instant and reached the seaman with a swift, sure stride that left the man breathless. In the swift approach, the master of the *Kestrel* slipped his pistol into his pocket, and when he faced the helmsman it was with bare hands and a grin of wolfish ferocity. The three men aloft saw it all. There was not much to see. The master gripped the terrified helmsman by the throat with two hands like steel claws, tripped his feet with a single kick, and dragged him to the poop ladder down which he hurled him.

"Put him to work, mister!" the master shouted to the mate, and turned aft again at speed to take the untended wheel before the storming ship had veered half a point from her course. Then, laying his pistol on the wheel gear casing, the master

conned his ship with uncanny skill, while all hands flew to their work as if driven by the devil.

The man he had flung down the ladder picked himself up with blood streaming into his eyes from a flapped eyebrow and ran like a scared cat to the pumps. Men made room for him, swearing vengeance but keeping their faces toward their job. The skysails fluttered, until restrained by their sheets, and to a vicious, tuneless drag they leaped aloft as the halyards were manned.

The old *Kestrel* quivered. Water lipped the scuppers and fought the outpouring gush from the bilges. The little wild brown face at the saloon porthole pressed closer to the brass rim, from which it had hastily drawn back when the helmsman hurled down past it; and the fear in the dark eyes widened them and made them awful in their intensity.

But the grim figure at the helm steered his ship without thought or glance at anything else than the presumptuous steamer out there between the *Kestrel* and the shining California shore. The clipper leaned to the added sail pressure until she thrummed through the seas like a terrified cachalot. The small boat of the pilot vessel danced across the jumping seas in the big ship's course, her steersman confident that the *Kestrel* would swerve into the wind or back her mainyards to take the pilot aboard. But there was no such intention. The grim master of the *Kestrel* held his course, with his gaze fastened upon the steamer, and only had a fleeting glance for

the pilot when the mate sang out that the boat was almost under the trampling bows. Then there was a crash of breaking oars, the small boat was hurled aside on the roaring bow wave of the ship, and the master's voice clangored out:

"Heave those men lines and pick 'em up!"

The *Kestrel* foamed on. Frantic men hurled rope ends; and, half drowned, pilot and crew clutched them and were dragged on board. The steamer slowly lost ground. The pilot and two furious boatmen stamped aft and mounted the poop ladder to confront the madman who had run them down.

"Mister!" bellowed the master. "Set the jib topsail!"

"Never mind jib topsails," the pilot raved, shaking a fist in the master's face. "You run me down. Are you crazy, or—?"

"Who the hell asked you to come aboard? Get for'ard and lend a hand, unless you want to swim back to your vessel, mister!" was the cold retort. And the two boatmen, looking once into the grim, haggard face, seeing the fiery, glinting eyes, only stammered half of their prepared protest and obeyed. The pilot took a second look, but he too obeyed. There was no pilot flag flying at the *Kestrel's* lofty truck, nor had there been.

So the ancient *Kestrel* swept past the pilot schooner; and the presumptuous steamer; and the other steamers who gave up the fight long ago; and

sailed proudly into San Francisco Bay under full sail like the old queen of the sea that she was, coming to anchor and riding there like a stately reminder of a dead and glorious past.

CHAPTER II

THE MASTER OF THE *KESTREL*

VAL ORSON sat upon the rail near the gangway and stared sardonically at the clustering small boats which dared not venture too near. The *Kestrel's* snowy wings were folded; and a clumsy sort of folding it was. The sails were bunched up on the yards, wrapped around with the gaskets like bundles of dirty washing. The men had refused duty after those gaskets were passed, and the two harassed mates had no heart to drive them. Some of the men were already in the boats alongside, cursing at Orson, shaking futile fists at him, promising dark and dreadful happenings if ever he stepped on shore. Other men hovered around the forecastle doors, glancing furtively aft, talking side-mouthed with shipmates inside, dubious still concerning that sardonic, motionless figure on the poop rail.

"He's all in, mate. Let's go get him," growled one.

"Hell, he ain't never all in," rasped a voice inside the forecastle. "Look what happened to the gal when she tried to knife him asleep. She had a chance, didn't she? Wot chance 'ud we have, in daylight? Wait, and cop him ashore, I sez."

"Come on out o' that hell-ship, you fellers!"

bawled one of the crew who had already entered a shore boat. "Ain't you got the heart to say so-long to that bloody man-killer?"

There was no change in the expression on Orson's haggard, tired face. He watched the rest of his crew slink out and cross the rail, some with bags, some without, but all with hatred for him expressed in the grinning teeth and glittering eyes. His face did not change when the second mate appeared dressed for the shore and took a hurried run into a waiting boat. His expression was scarcely capable of change; he looked what he felt, contempt for such scum as could be driven from a ship by one man, even though that one man were himself.

The chief mate walked on to the poop. Orson did not look around at his footstep. That was one of the many things which kept men under Val Orson's subjection; his mysterious power of command over himself which never permitted him to show interest or fear, yet never failed to bring him to the scratch of advantage in emergency. The mate might have been meditating assault. Some of the men in the boats, now pulling away and having a broader view of the ship's deck, seemed to expect that was in the mate's mind. They bellowed encouragement. Still Orson ignored the mate, who stood awkwardly by.

"Crew's gone, sir," the officer stammered presently.

At the moment there was one boat just leaving the ship's side; and up from the saloon flew the Malay

steward almost pale from nervousness, with his belongings tied in a linen bundle. Orson laughed at last. The little brown man darted a frightened glance up at the grim figure on the poop, then sprang upon the rail, frantically waving his bundle at the last boat, screaming to the boatman to wait for him. His bundle fell into the sea, and Orson stepped from the rail laughing contemptuously. That laugh sent the palpitating steward overboard in panic, and the last of the *Kestrel's* crew had left the ship, excepting the chief mate, and to him Val Orson turned abruptly.

"The rats have gone, you mean! There's your last chance to join them, mister," pointing to the boat in which the half-drowned steward was being emptied of water.

"I'm in no hurry, Captain Orson," the mate said, coloring.

"Mean to get your pay, huh?"

"I've earned it, sir."

"Well, you can get it to-morrow. I'll remember that you neither refused duty nor quit the ship, if that's all that's bothering you. Might as well get ashore. I suppose you've had enough o' me, like the rest."

"I've had plenty o' you, Captain. A very little's a big plenty," returned Mr. Martin with astonishing boldness. "I like the ship, though. She's a beauty, and can't help her skipper. I'll stay by her unless I'm discharged, sir."

For the second time Val Orson laughed, and this time there was a new note in his laughter. His face was neither sardonic nor grim when he looked fixedly into the mate's uncertain eyes.

"You're a bold man, Martin," he said. "From the moment when the cook jumped into the health doctor's boat, the first rat, up to this moment, I haven't seen one damned man aboard this ship I wanted to stand by. You might have said you liked me. I'd have said you lied. No man likes me. But when you say you like my ship, I believe you. A sailorman must like her. Stay by the ship if you want to. Damn good thing we've got a cargo of tin. That won't spoil if she sinks under you while I'm ashore to report."

Mr. Martin stared after the skipper as he went below to dress, as if he suspected liquor. It was a long time since any man had heard Captain Valentine Orson deliver himself of a speech of such length. It was a long time, too, since any man had told Valentine Orson his personal opinion of him at the length of an arm.

In the cabin, Val Orson sat at the table trying to keep awake long enough to fill out his port papers. There were the pratique certificate; the register; manifest; bill of health; last light bill; list of stores; search note, etc. And to take ashore for paying off the crew, if the crew appeared for paying off, which was unlikely, since the mate had not given the

time honored "That'll do, men," therefore, they had deserted the ship, he had to prepare the ship's articles, official log, and the seamen's last discharges. These papers glimmered up from the red tablecloth at his tired eyes until he could have readily torn them all into shreds in order that he might fling himself down somewhere and sleep. He kept awake by heroic measures; twigging the hairs in his nostrils. But even that infuriated him. His will power was great, his brain was alert, but his physical muscular being cried for surcease. His head touched the table, spilling the ink bottle; and then from his stateroom crept a small brown woman who had in her eyes the wide frightened look of a wild creature, and who touched his bowed head with her flowerlike hands as if she touched a god.

Val Orson was "out" at last. The crew that had run like rats from the ship would have gloated. His grizzled hair lay in a sopping pool of ink; his glittering eyes were closed in a sleep of tremendous exhaustion. The papers he had prepared lay under his outflung hands; and the cabin clock, ticking with hollow rhythm, indicated in vain that the hour was late; that he would soon be unable to report his ship's arrival until to-morrow.

The brown girl perched on the table beside him, gently raised his head, and laid it on her lap. Then her soft fingers caressed his temples, separated the tangled hair, and revealed a long, wicked looking

scar running across the scalp. The dark, wide eyes grew somber at sight of it. The small, slim figure grew tense, and under the gaudy silken bodice the round, girlish breasts rose and fell. Very softly the fingers stroked that great scar. Softly the red, full lips touched it. And the girl sat motionless thereafter for hours, aching with exquisite cramps in her constrained position, willing to endure worse that he might rest untroubled.

Once, when it had grown dark, Mr. Martin came below to see if the Captain had perhaps gone ashore unseen by him while he was in the galley. He lit a lamp, and looked full into steadily blazing eyes which told him very clearly that he had better be about his affairs and never dare to disturb Val Orson. Martin glanced at the ship's papers, then took himself off to his own cabin to smoke and ponder.

Every sailorman from end to end of the seven seas knew or had heard about Val Orson and the *Kestrel.* Orson had put in almost all of his seagoing life in the famous old clipper. There was a period when she had been sold "foreign," having outlived her best days; and during that period Val Orson had vanished from the greater ports. Rumor had much to say regarding him. Variously he was suspected of having been in jail; a-pirating; smuggling; treasure hunting. Actually, all that was known was that he reappeared suddenly one day at the

helm of a decrepit and shamefully misused old square-rigger, which was half-way manned by a hang-dog west coast crew who ran like curs before the anchor was down. It took the waterfront habitués only a very short time to spread the news that Val Orson was back again, and had bought the old *Kestrel* and sailed her in to refit and load cargo.

Cut down the old clipper had been by her foreign owners, to save men. The job had been butchered, also to save money. Those dainty skysail yards that had been her pride in many a Far Eastern port in the proud days of clipper ships, had been sent down and sawed and chopped up for firewood. The royal yards, too, had come down. The masts, however, had been left standing, gaunt and bare, to mock the eye with memories of former graces. In like fashion, the yards had been stripped from the mizzenmast entirely. The *Kestrel* had been sailed as a barque instead of as a ship; but the mizzenmast was still the old ship's mizzen, with topmast, topgallant and royal mast, and slender skysail pole. Paint had never been wasted by the foreign vandals. When Orson sailed her home again, she was forlorn and unkempt like some derelict that had wandered for ages on a dead sea. So she looked; and men, when Val Orson was not near by, snickered and said he had bought a coffin for himself.

He fitted her out. How, none but himself knew. Men quit him, driven away by his mad ferocity. He

worked harder himself. If a man, or a gang, only stayed half a day, that man or that gang performed a full bout of work before quitting. That was inevitable. No man ever cheated Val Orson of his due of labor, as long as Orson was at hand in person. So the old, flaked paint was scraped away, and new paint put on. Yards went aloft again, on mizzenmast, and fore and main. There were problems to be tackled in replacing that lofty rig, and they were not all problems of rigging. There would always be the problem of crews. Let Val Orson have his lofty clipper towed around to a port where no man knew him, and he might secure a full crew. But that would be the only time a full crew manned his ship, for they would quit at the first dropping of the anchor. Orson had been a bucko as a mate, and man-killer as a master. Sailing with him in a three-skysail yarder was going to be no bed o' roses for sailormen; and when that three-skysail yarder was fifty years old, and had survived what the old *Kestrel* had survived, there was but little nourishment in the job for anybody.

So in the rigging of the ship there was the problem to face of substituting mechanical expedients for a doubtful human quantity. Tackling this in his own masterful fashion, Orson had made use of all the trick inventions of patent reefing gear, gipsy winches, rigging screws, and the rest. That was evidence of madness, men said. If he wanted to run the old ship cheaply until she saved him further

expense by sinking with him, he could have let her keep the shortened rig the foreigners had disfigured her with. But, much though they knew, they knew little of Val Orson's soul. Val Orson had a picture painted on the inside of his brig sea chest, a picture by a Japanese artist of god-like skill, and it showed the *Kestrel* speeding like a glorious creature full of vibrant life, clothed to the dogvanes with gleaming canvas, a rainbow in the shattered spray at her golden figurehead, milk-white foam at her lee bow and lean flank, and sunlight singing in every glistening line of her oiled spars and tarred rigging. Few men knew of that picture's existence. Fewer men knew that every night while refitting the ship, when the stubborn conflict of the day's work was done, Orson sat for hours with the chest lid raised, gazing at the picture, mentally comparing the progress of his labors with that lovely presentment. It mattered not at all how fierce had been the day; that evening hour had the softness of an hour of devotion before a sacred shrine.

None knew so well as he to what degree age and neglect had eaten into the old ship's vitals. Men might call her his coffin. He knew very well that she might prove to be even that. But he knew that before his coffin was in demand every ounce of hard driven man power, every cell of a sea-cunning brain, every last sob of a sailor's fighting soul would have been hurled upon the expiring fires of a lost endeavor.

And so the *Kestrel* was refitted outwardly in the glory of her prime. She had so arrested the eye by her amazing transformation that Orson had secured a crew for the first voyage out East; and he had secured a cargo, which was a rather more subtle compliment, since shippers are ever more scrupulous and critical concerning the bottoms they ship in than are sailors. Even Ken Martin had fallen for her appearance; and Martin knew a ship. What Martin lacked was a knowledge of Val Orson. Only hearing of him, from a long, long distance, Martin believed he was only another instance of the genus bucko, and Martin knew buckos.

It took but a few days of that initial outward passage to determine relative values aboard the rejuvenated *Kestrel,* for she was wracked and nail-sick, keeping men by the pumps throughout the passage; her master proved a driving fool, whose daily delight was to cast up the reckoning to a decimal point, after driving his crew to the point of mutiny which he had an inhuman knack of quelling unaided, and compare the day's run with some one day's run out of a decade-old log kept when the *Kestrel* was the pride of the China fleet.

Then of course the crew jumped ship in the first anchorage. Even the second mate skipped. Martin stayed by the ship because he was a married man, first of all, but really because he had a sailor's pride in a fine ship, and had seen that the *Kestrel* was a

has-been kept going and made to keep going by a man who might be mad, but who was a sure enough sailor. There had been a tedious round of Eastern ports before Banca tin supplied a cargo. How the shippers ever trusted precious ore to the old *Kestrel* was a mystery known only to Orson and his agent. But there it was. And somehow a crew was raked up. That is, a number of men secured, perhaps by methods as devious as those by which the tin ore was obtained.

The voyage home had been a nightmare. Martin had not entirely awakened from it yet. There was first of all the Malay girl. Nobody knew she was on board until the ship cleared Banca Straits; that is, nobody except Orson. Everybody knew at once, when anybody knew. That was a side to his character that Orson's critics and enemies had hitherto overlooked or at least remained quiet about. Perhaps keeping quiet was the proper term, since sailors since Noah's day have ever been indulgent toward brothers of the cloth where a lady fair crept in.

Orson's lady was not fair. She was a spitting, wildcat thing scarcely big or old enough to be called woman even in the precocious East; and when Orson carried her on deck that first morning at sea, she had writhed in his arms like a python, clawing, biting, screaming, until she saw within reach a sailor with a knife at his belt; then she had reached out, with astounding surety snatched the knife, and

stabbed Orson in the head. All hands saw it; for it was at the hour of changing the morning watch, when every man was on deck to swing up the gear all around after the night's dews. It was the first illustration the new crew had of Orson's possibilities for trouble. Martin, who had learned to respect the sheer manhood in the skipper, was shocked at the manner in which that stab was received. There was no dropping of the girl, no outburst, no falling to the deck. Though his scalp and face streamed blood, and he reeled under the vicious stroke, Val Orson retained his grasp of the girl until he carried her over to the skylight above the saloon, where he set her down as gently as if she had kissed him with her red lips instead of with steel; and a fat Bengali, a lean Lascar, and a conjecturing Greek-Dyak half-cast who had early-on contemplated murder went about their business thoughtfully.

Orson had taken the girl's shawl and bound his head with it. Then he had taken the girl in his great arms and patted her naked shoulder, talking to her in the Dyak dialect until she no longer had the wild-cat aspect. There followed days, weeks, months at sea; brutal driving, manhandling, wearisome hardship. And as men saw the old ship kept afloat by the raw he-manhood of the master, they also saw the wild brown girl fall under the spell of the same qualities and turn from slaveship to worship.

Martin recollected all these things as he sat in

his little cabin pondering, and the sight of the little brown woman on the table, nursing Orson's ink-coated head in her lap, made him wonder if he knew anything at all about the notorious master of the *Kestrel.*

He was aroused from a sort of dazed reverie by heavy hurried footsteps on deck and he started to his feet and ran up the companionway in time to encounter a couple of eager young fellows who forced him back by the mere enthusiasm of their youthful errand.

"This is Captain Orson's ship, isn't it? We want to interview him," they cried.

"Captain Orson's resting. You can't see him," Martin retorted. "Better not make any noise, either, or—"

"We must see him!" the youths chorused. They pushed against the mate, peering into the dimly lighted saloon. The dark-eyed girl glared at the intruders. The mate strove against them, but youthful enthusiasm prevailed.

"Is it true that the *Kestrel's* made a record for sail across the Pacific?" they demanded.

The little brown girl suddenly tumbled over on the table, and Val Orson staggered to his feet, alert, suddenly wakeful.

"Come in, gentlemen!" he said, striding to the foot of the stairs. "Record, d'ye say? I haven't made up the log yet, but if there's talk of a record—sit down and I'll get the log!"

One of the youths giggled at sight of the inked hair; the wild-eyed girl turned upon him with a tigerish snarl; and there was no more notice taken of that ink stain.

CHAPTER III

PRIDE

THE *Kestrel* was taken alongside the discharging berth and Val Orson swelled up with pride. Those young scribes had got their story, and in the manner of their kind had made the most of it. It was a good story too; worthy of being made much of. When Orson stepped ashore, barely within the twenty-four hour limit in which he had to report his ship at the Custom House, the dock was lined with people who came to stare at the man who had beaten a sailing record with a decrepit old has-been like the *Kestrel.* Mr. Martin shared in the glory too, for his place was on the forecastle head in mooring ship; and he ordered the gang of shore roustabouts who handled his lines as if he were the brass-bound chief officer of a first chop tea clipper in the sixties.

The skipper halted ten yards from the gangway, and curiosity seekers gathered around. He seemed oblivious to them; nor did he appear to be concerned about the ship. Running on board again, he went into the saloon, and presently emerged with the brown woman whose small exotic face was alight with eagerness. Mr. Martin, as well as other beholders, grinned a little after Orson's back was turned. Strange things had happened in ships in

the Eastern trade; but few shipmates had the temerity to flaunt their little light loves ashore in a home port. There was apparently no fathoming Val Orson. He made his own laws, and only obeyed those when he felt like it. At the street he hailed a cab, put the girl in it, and gave the driver the address of some foreign mission. And the last thing Mr. Martin could see from the ship by craning his neck, was Orson striding away toward the Custom House, and a disappearing cab in the distance out of which hung perilously half the body of a wildly furious little brown woman who screamed weird curses after the man who had coolly discarded her.

A few of the late crew had been hanging about near the ship; skulking around corners, always in pairs. When Orson stepped down the gangway, these men disappeared, dodging back to places of vantage along the route he must take. But Orson was safe from attack. There were far too many people down there, admiring the old ship, for anybody to pull rough stuff in daylight.

But something happened when the skipper returned in mid-afternoon, having finished his business. He paused only long enough to tell Mr. Martin a few details of the ship's possible future, and to bid him keep strangers off, and went below to gloat over the precious log-book wherein was set down a record passage which he had not dreamed he was making. And lest the fact seemed too amazing, it may be kept in mind that from the moment of losing

sight of the land back East, to the splash of his anchor at home, there had never been a day that did not call for every wink of his eye, every vibration of his nerve fibers, in order to keep the ship going and to prevent twenty thirsty knives from slipping between his ribs. On principle he drove the ship. It was her splendid capacity for speed that had endeared her to him years ago. When he drove her to beat those steamers making the harbor, and when he ran down the pilot he had never asked for, he was only flaunting his vessel's pride in the eyes of beholders. By just doing that, indeed, he had actually taken an hour from the old sailing record for the passage. It was only when told about it that he verified it by careful correction of times in his reckoning. But since he knew it, Val Orson had no time for other thoughts, no desire to speak of anything else; nor was his desire permitted to urge him to converse about it with others. If asked, he would answer; but by far the deepest thrill was obtained merely by perusing those magic pages and gloating over the result.

It was about the hour when labor should cease for the day, when Mr. Martin was once more heard trying to prevent some persistent people from entering the saloon where Val Orson sat with his precious record. But these folk out-talked Mr. Martin; and, moreover, they did it in an authoritative manner which soon silenced the mate. They trooped down the stairs.

"Damnation! Is my ship a public bar?" roared the skipper, leaping to his feet in a rage. The sunlight streamed through the skylight, finding the great black ink blot on the table-cloth and giving it the appearance of an eclipse in a red, red sky.

"Just a moment, captain, before you blow up," said a fine tall man with curly hair. He spoke as if he saw no reason at all for fearing Val Orson. "I am from the Swedish Consul. Two of your men have laid complaint against you."

"I am from the Greek. Also I have complaint," another man said with a white toothed smile. There were two more, a cheery Britisher, in the interests of the once fat Bengali and three always lean Lascars; and a Portuguese who seemed far less concerned about the complaint he came to investigate than in the faded splendors of the rather stately old saloon he had entered.

Val Orson's eyes blazed.

"Leave your complaints, and I'll attend to them in the morning," he snapped. "My papers are deposited in order, and what any complaints can be about you will find in the log."

The Portuguese had been stepping around the saloon, and at the mizzenmast paneling was now closely examining a beautifully carved bas relief of a kestrel hawk in flight.

"Captain," he cried, with subdued excitement, "can it be that this is the famous old *Kestrel,* once a crack ship of the China trade?"

"Certainly. What other craft could break records at nigh sixty years old?" retorted Orson.

"You are a lucky man to command her, sir!" the Portuguese said warmly. "My countrymen tried to buy this ship when they bought the *Cutty Sark,* the *Thermopylæ,* and other grand clippers."

"Pity they didn't. They wouldn't have treated her as she was treated by the damned ship murderers who did have her. Greeks, they were."

"My country have not much experience with sailing ship like this," the Greek smiled with a shrug. "But we have good sailors, yes. I have a complaint here, captain—"

"Speaking of crack clippers, was this ship ever as fast as *Cutty Sark* or *Thermopylæ?"* drawled the pleasant Britisher.

"This ship has had a most glorious career," the Portuguese declared. "Perhaps she has been fortunate in her captain on this last astonishing voyage." He bowed to Orson, and Orson beamed with pride. There was a bell on the table, and the skipper pounded it twice before he recalled with a flash of embarrassment that he had no steward.

"Have seats, gentlemen, I want you to try some wine I bought in Java," he said.

When the wine had been around twice, there was in progress a warm argument concerning ships, sailors, and kindred things. The tall Scandinavian had little to say, but said it with the deep understanding of his race in matters maritime; and without offense

he upheld the reputation of his people as seamen. The Portuguese spoke with pride of his nation, justly. It was to Portugal that many a glorious clipper had gone in her mellow age. If the Portuguese had ceased building ships, they had certainly retained their keen eye for class. The slow speaking, genial Britisher had little to remark; but he intrigued Val Orson by going very intimately into the details of the record-making passage, arguing points of sailing expertly as became a man who had sailed one full voyage as a boy in the flying *Thermopylæ*. The Greek drank wine, and smiled. He remained in the saloon, with the bottle, while Val Orson conducted the other men around the ship in the gathering dusk, showing her off to them as if she were still in the first flush of her glory. Mr. Martin tagged along with a flashlight; and by the time they returned to the saloon Mr. Martin was almost convinced of the old ship's splendor. He was so helpful, reminding Orson of little points overlooked, that he was invited to take a glass of wine before the guests departed.

"Good luck, captain," the Swede said, raising his glass.

"More records to you, sir," the Briton offered.

"Paying cargoes," was the toast of the Portuguese. The Greek swallowed his wine very quickly, a little unsteady on his feet.

"Captain, here I have a complaint—" he began to state in official tones. His companions laughed,

gathered him among them, and bade Orson good evening, trooping up the stairs and down the gangway to the wharf as if complaints were only to be considered as jests—at least at that mellow hour of the evening.

CHAPTER IV

FAME

It took several days to convince Val Orson that he had become a character.

He had always known that men hated him for his hard fisted methods. A driver he had always been; always would be. But here was another sort of fame. It was almost popularity. The crew's complaints had drifted away like mists upon his appearance at the various consulates; where he made affidavits that all hands except Mr. Martin had deserted the ship after refusing duty. And his picture got into the papers. In the big Sunday supplements, fanciful pictures showed his cherished old ship foaming along through turbulent seas with whole fleets of sail and steam craft tailing out astern.

Then one night after the cargo was all out, and the ship had been towed to the anchorage to wait for a call to loading berth, Orson brought on board a newly painted picture of the old *Kestrel* making harbor on that last tremendous passage. It had been painted by a sailor artist, and showed every seam of the canvas, every reef point, every little detail. It was bad art, but no sailor dared say that anything had been left out. There was only one place in his stateroom where a picture of such a

size could hang; that place was occupied by a framed picture of a nude woman. Orson snatched that down, flung it into his bunk, and held the new picture up in place of it, estimating the problem of hanging. The stateroom was littered with newspapers. A clipping of every piece of news concerning him or his ship lay in a shallow tray on the desk; the papers from which the clippings came formed the litter. Orson's den looked more like the study of a budding writer than the sleeping place of a notorious hardcase windjammer skipper.

Searching in a drawer for screws with which to fasten his painting, the skipper hurled forth a heap of photographs. There were dozens of pretty faces in that heap—white girls, brown girls, olive beauties, yellow nymphs; and all smiled at him. Val Orson had no eye for any of them. He was enamored of his new picture of his oldest love. The other pictures he bundled into the drawer again as soon as he found the screws he sought.

There were many trifles in that stateroom which eloquently proclaimed that a woman's presence was the rule rather than an exception. Here a port curtain had been looped back with a hair ribbon. The curtain at the head of the broad built-in bed was fastened with nothing less than a dainty garter of ruffled silk. Under the desk, among his own sturdy boots and shoes, more than one pair of high heeled slippers held place; a silk shawl hung from a peg under his own coarse watch coat.

But for these things Orson had no time at present. He sat in his swivel chair, feet up on the desk, smoking a strong black cheroot, and gazing through the smoke at the painted *Kestrel.* He had procured a book of sailing records from a second-hand bookstore, and it lay under his hand, unopened. So far as records were concerned, his old *Kestrel* had them all beaten. The fame of that last passage home worked in Val Orson like a malignant yeast. He had passed the period of enjoying the triumph, and had arrived at the point where he believed himself more than common man.

Mr. Martin entered the saloon and knocked on the stateroom door. Orson bade him enter as a monarch might have bidden a suppliant. Mr. Martin was hungry. While the ship lay alongside the wharf, the mate had eaten three meals a day at a restaurant near by, charging the expenses to the ship's account. But there was no cook aboard the *Kestrel,* and the shore lay a good fair mile away. Orson had been too full of his pride to think about food.

"Ought to engage a cook, if you don't get a stooard," said Mr. Martin. "Ought to have a watchman, too."

Orson slowly turned, blew out a thick jet of smoke, and nodded toward the new picture.

"Beauty, ain't she?" he drawled. Martin saw the picture. It was a long time since Orson's cabin walls had been without a woman's picture. Martin

resented the way his reasonable demand was met and sidetracked. Fame had turned the skipper's head, it was obvious. But fame had done something more; it had increased Mr. Martin's self-esteem. A man can hardly be chief mate of a record-breaking clipper lying alongside the dock and not swell up a bit with pride. Everybody knows that a sailing ship can be made or unmade by her chief officer. Mr. Martin had been rather glad to be chief mate of the *Kestrel* when she arrived. Now he was more than glad of mere position. He was aware of his own worth. Furthermore, he was hungry, and he had no intention whatever of standing a lone, hungry watch on a deserted ship in the harbor. Deserted he knew she would be very soon, if Orson lived up to reputation. Orson was never known to live a solitary life of bachelorhood, even at sea. Martin could not yet understand why the little brown woman had been driven ashore. Under some pretext or another the skipper always had a female in the ship; as stewardess, wife, cousin, passenger, sometimes without any explanation. But in such a busy port as San Francisco, particularly now that he was famous and visitors were the rule for a wonder, even Val Orson would be careful about bringing a woman on board. The only thing left was what he probably would do; spend his time ashore until a cargo was secured and a loading berth taken.

"Do you want me to go ashore to eat, captain?" the mate persisted. Orson did not seem greatly

interested in the subject. He was squinting this way and that through the smoke, getting new angles on that flying clipper. Martin asserted himself: "Captain Abbott told me he needed a mate in the *Huntress*. He keeps a Chiney cook."

Val Orson reached forward and straightened the picture frame an inch.

"Give my regards to Captain Abbott when you go aboard, Mr. Martin," he said without heat or anger. Martin smothered an oath and ran on deck to hail a shore boat, promising to return for his dunnage in the morning.

As for Orson, he sat for an hour before a subtle gnawing inside advised him that his big lean body needed food. Perhaps then for the first time he really missed the presence of others in the ship. In the deserted steward's pantry he found a tin of cabin biscuit and a half of a red Dutch cheese that had survived all the way from Java Head. That, with some of the Java wine, filled him, and with appetite appeased, out of immediate sight of that painting, he came back to more mundane matters than dreams. When he realized that he had let Martin go, he swore savagely; but then he had to laugh at the manner of it. He had never believed the mate was man enough to take him at his word like that. And he did not think any the less of Mr. Martin for doing it. But the occurrence did bring home forcibly the fact that he was absolutely alone in his ship, and something must be done.

With a fresh cheroot he sat on the saloon skylight on the poop, scanning the dark waters for a boat. There was no oil in the cabin lamps, and he was in no mood to search for any. He was in no hurry; but presently there would be a boat, and he would go ashore at once and hire a cook and watchman. The city lights and the stars speckled the bay; and distant ferry-boats crawled back and forth like many-eyed water bugs. But no boat approached the *Kestrel.* She bore no riding light. Perhaps boatmen regarded her as a barren proposition.

But after an hour of waiting a rowboat swam into the ship's blacker shadow; and as if in response to Orson's hail it drew in to the ladder.

"You take your time!" growled the skipper irritably, stepping to the ladder head. Somebody was ascending. And a pompous young man pushed past and confronted Val Orson on his own ship's deck.

"Are you Captain Orson?" he demanded, with the tone of one who speaks with privilege behind him.

"Well?" snapped Orson, uncivilly.

"I've come to see you concerning a young native woman who came to our Mission. She charges that you abducted her, kept her in shame, and discarded her on arrival here. Our Mission did what it could for her; but the poor creature disappeared to-day, and I am here to demand that you release her if you have taken her into this ship again."

"That's quite a speech, Mister," drawled Orson, spreading his feet and crouching to peer into the man's face. "You was trained in a good school for lying. Or maybe you don't understand women very well. I brought a native girl home. She stowed away in my cabin when she brought my laundry. She kicked and fought all the way home to be released. See here, what she gave me." Taking off his cap, the skipper parted his hair, thrust his head close to the other's face. "Guess you can't see; feel if you want to. She knifed me. I put her in a carriage and shipped her to you folks to take care of her. If you lost her, that's your hard luck."

"The woman says you kept her in your cabin, and forced her to—"

"Mister, you talk too much! You've got your gall talking to me this way on my own ship. Boat ahoy, there! Stand by to pick this up."

Val Orson seized the missioner as he might pick up a sack of flour, and hove him over the rail into the harbor. And then as the boat pulled away after picking up the sputtering victim, the skipper halted it with a shout, remembering that he had meant to go ashore himself. He sat beside the man he had dumped, and listened with grim enjoyment to shivering, teeth-chattering threats all the way to the landing. And when the forlorn emissary promised legal proceedings within twenty-four hours, Orson laughed with great good humor.

"If you find her, your lawyer'll have something

to go on," he mocked. "Send her down to me if you get her. I guess I turned her adrift too soon. She was an amusing little hellcat."

He returned on board within the hour, taking a cook and an ancient watchman. But the episode of the missioner had started a train of thought which would not let him sleep. Val Orson had a strong liking for women. He had been without feminine companionship for a long time. And now that the lights no longer shone on his new picture, his mental vision conjured up before him all of his many conquests and they murdered sleep.

CHAPTER V

A NEW FACE

At the end of a week there was a cargo for the *Kestrel,* and she was hauled alongside the lumber mills to load. Orson had found shippers overcautious, even with the flavor of that wonderful record to dazzle their eyes. One or two had visited him aboard the ship; they had complimented him, praised his old clipper and drunk his wine. But everybody knew the old *Kestrel* was wracked and tender. Most shrewd shippers believed that no other man could have brought her back to port at all, record or no record. But a lumber cargo will never help an old ship to sink; as many a crooked speculator in dying ships has discovered. There was a load of redwood lumber to go around the Horn, and Val Orson secured this cargo.

Then it was necessary for him to find a mate at least, to take care of the loading for ship's account. And he sought out Mr. Martin. The *Huntress* was ready for sea. Martin had been her first mate for just one week; and on the only occasion Orson had seen him since letting him go, he looked well fed and content. But Val Orson wanted him. A full week's pay had been saved, to say nothing of a week's food, all dutifully paid by old Abbott of the

Huntress, so Mr. Martin would be a bargain now, and Orson went to get him.

After securing the cargo, Orson's whole attitude underwent a change. For a while he had basked in the sunlight of publicity, and men found him human. Now he was the overbearing master and owner of a record-breaking clipper loading an outward cargo; and moreover he was considering a crew. Still more, he was casting eyes at likely waterside ladies. It was his weakness and he never pretended virtue. On one of his journeys through the waterside district he had caught a swiftly fleeting glimpse of one of his late crew, a Greek; and he had been ready to swear that the girl with the Greek sailor was the girl who had run from the mission.

There had been no outcome to the threat of the legal proceedings. There was no girl to produce against Orson. But he had been reminded of her, and he remembered that toward the end of the passage which she had inaugurated by knifing him, the half-wild creature had softened very much indeed. And since his business carried him again through the street where he believed he had seen her, he kept a wide weather eye lifted for anything that looked like an Eastern shawl. It was at the door of the outfitter's from whom he expected to hear news about Mr. Martin's availability that he caught sight of the Greek and the girl; and there was no doubt whatever that the girl was she whom he thought he

sought. The rapidity with which the Greek sailor vanished around the corner, dragging the girl after him, might hint at a wish to avoid Orson at that moment; if so, it accounted for the utter disappearance of both when the skipper dashed to the corner after him.

"The damned slippery—" Orson cut the sentence short, opened his bright eyes wider, and pulled himself together, for a new face had flashed across his view.

Only a flash of a big-eyed pink face under a floppy sort of velvet tam-o'-shanter, but there was something which attracted him even in that. There was shyness, real or assumed; a friendly, toothsome smile; health, youth, and no overwhelming degree of wisdom. There was a certain litheness about the girl, too. Val Orson liked his women lithe. Also not too wise.

The whole street was composed of houses of one pattern. By the time he had regained his wits to hurry after the new face, she had entered one of the houses along the street; and Val Orson strode up and down the pavement twice, swearing at the idiots who built houses all alike. When he had returned to his corner, without success, the outfitter he came to see was standing in his store entrance, and the skipper attended to business. The girl must belong where she had gone, because she had not taken time to knock at the door but had gone

straight inside so fast that she must have had her own key and have been expert in the use of it.

He asked the outfitter a leading question, and the man grinned.

"All the street is full of girls, and some is, and some ain't. Daytime there's dozens workin' in sewin' shops, makin' awnin's and stuff. Night time some of 'em as has homes goes to 'em; some stays out and makes a bit of overtime, cap. Ain't chasin' no sailor-town fluff yerself, are ye? I can give you addresses of better'n that."

"I saw a man I want, along with a girl down the street. If I could find her I'd find him, likely," Orson returned smoothly. Then he turned to the real business of his visit; the stealing of Mr. Martin from easy old Captain Abbott.

"He's only half baked, but he knows the *Kestrel* and I'll trust him," Orson stated.

"Dunno how you're going to get him, cap." The outfitter scratched his head. With other ship masters he would have driven a shrewd dicker; he was afraid of Orson. Orson had a habit of getting what he wanted. But the *Huntress* was sailing on the next morning's tide, her crew all aboard, and the last man able to get shore leave at that late hour was the mate. This was explained to Orson.

"You've got to get him," the skipper insisted. "There ain't another mate in 'Frisco who'll go in the *Kestrel* with me. Besides, I want Martin. Can you get another mate for Abbott in an hour?"

"I can get six mates for any ship out o' 'Frisco except yours," grinned the outfitter; and Orson took no offense.

"Then get one. Have him ready with his dunnage here in the store. I'm going to swear out a warrant for thieving against Martin and have him pinched."

The man stared after the skipper as he bustled out to the street. But he grinned, shook his head admiringly, and got busy with the telephone.

At dawn the next morning the *Huntress* got her anchor and went to sea. The song of her crew at the windlass awakened Val Orson. As she swam by the *Kestrel's* berth in tow of a tug, with her lower topsails set and her upper topsails going aloft jerkily, Orson had his telescope upon the stout figure of decent old Captain Abbott, and could see nothing very much amiss. Swinging the glass to the *Huntress's* forecastle head, Orson saw a brisk young mate conning the work of getting the anchor aboard and setting the fore topsail; and there was no reason, forward or aft, aboard the *Huntress* to cause Val Orson to reproach himself for having stolen her last chief mate.

The cook served breakfast an hour early, having been frightened out of his wits by the skipper's early rising. And Orson had but just finished the meal, licking his lips with relish, when a policeman came aboard from the dock and asked for him. The mill workers were swarming to the time-clocks; the

loading foreman was talking to the superintendent about the apparent slackness of the *Kestrel's* skipper in getting ready, and Orson was being told that Martin lay in jail, waiting to be charged with stealing, and furiously denying any theft. Orson's presence was needed at once.

Nonchalantly waving a hand at the superintendent, who shouted that he wanted to speak to him, and shouting back the promise that he would be ready to load in an hour, Val Orson jumped into a cab behind the mill and drove police stationward with a broad grin on his face. He saw the officer at the police station, and coolly informed him that he had found the article he believed had been stolen by Martin. Martin was brought out, and what he omitted to say to Orson was not at the time in human vocabulary. Orson heard it all with a saddened expression. Then he took the arm of Mr. Martin.

"It was that little floosey, Mr. Martin," he said, soothingly. "It's a damned shame. But come back and take your old berth in the *Kestrel.* It's the least I can do to make it up to you. Come right aboard, Mister. We're all ready to load. You won't lose a day's pay. Perhaps you'll like it as well."

Thus the *Kestrel* secured her mate and received her cargo. A good cook and steward were aboard. Mr. Martin was full fed and contented, he was really rather glad that he had missed the *Huntress* after all, for Captain Abbott was a

fatherly old sort who might speak softly to his mate, but would never shed lustre on anybody by breaking records with his ship.

Captain Orson spent hours along the waterfront. At the outfitter's store he grew to be a nuisance; but nobody dared tell him that. One morning he again saw the Greek sailor with the little brown woman, and the man was drunk, the woman performing a wild native dance in the street. Both ran out of sight when a policeman started after them; and Orson laughed; he no longer had any interest in the brown woman. As for the Greek sailor, he was non-existent.

But that new face that had flashed across the skipper's view remained elusive. Describe her as he might, Orson could find nobody who could identify the girl. After three days, when he had exhausted every possible source of information, he was convinced that she was no waterside hussy at least; or if she was she was a deep one, and no indiscreet fly-by-night trollop.

When the ship was within two days of completing loading, and it became necessary to round up a crew, other matters took all of the skipper's waking time, and he had to give up the search for that new face. He expected trouble in securing a crew. That was a part of his troublous life. At the various places where men were usually to be got, he expected to find nobody. And for once in his life was surprised. At the store of the outfitter he found two men who

took his breath away for an instant with the sheer quality of them.

"What's wrong with 'em?" he demanded of the outfitter, while staring rudely at the young fellows who seemed to be regarding him curiously.

"Ain't they good men?" the man grinned, shoving forward some papers for Orson to see. "They just paid off a big windjammer from Kobe. They've heard so much about you and the *Kestrel* they don't even want shore leave if they can ship with you."

"We're both able seamen, sir," one of the healthy youngsters put in. "We'd like a chance in the *Kestrel.*"

Orson appeared unable to believe it. He glanced at the outfitter, who grinned queerly. The youngsters were upright and self-reliant, meeting his fierce scrutiny frankly. They were rather more like young college men out for sport than able seamen from a deepwaterman seeking a new ship before they had lost their last sea-legs.

"They told me they'd heard the *Kestrel* was a blood boat and you were a killer, and wanted to look," the outfitter remarked, fearful that Orson was going to refuse these men, badly though he needed them. The outfitter needed his fee. The skipper's eyes flashed. Men like that were rare. He liked to have such as they out at sea, where he could make their souls writhe and watch the sport. He nodded curtly.

"Sign on to-morrow morning," he said. Then,

leaving his order for a complete crew, he hurried out on his other errands, and outside the door of the store ran hard against the new face he had been seeking. The girl dropped some parcels, and looked frightened until Orson picked them up and smiled down at her. She tried to avoid his overbold gaze, but he was speaking to her as he piled her bundles in her arms, and she was forced to look up. Then he saw that she had the sun-browned look of a country girl; the sun-browned look and the mildly bovine expression of a simple soul whose healthy young body had been developed rather more rapidly than her mentality. Briefly, she was a simple wench from the open fields or the farm, transplanted to the grimmest part of the city and not yet comfortable in the new environment.

"Beg pardon, missy, I hope I didn't hurt you," smiled Orson. He was dusting off a parcel with one hand while holding her arm with the other, leading her in the direction in which she had been going when he collided with her. "Let me carry some of these things. Where do you live?"

He was keenly scanning her as he talked; and he saw that she was free limbed and lithe, young and full breasted, mature in a womanly way, and not over intelligent. She seemed frightened and flattered at the same time; as if somebody had told her to beware of strange men, but Orson rather overrode her fears.

"I work down here, sir," she said shyly. "I can take the things now, thank you sir."

He looked up at the house she had stopped before. It was a boarding house.

"I'm dining room girl," she smiled simply.

"You're a very pretty girl," he said, laying the last parcel on the heap in her arms and pinching her red cheek softly. "Can you get out to-night and go to a show with me? I'm a stranger in the city, too. I'm a sailor."

"Oh, I can't get out at night, sir," she simpered. "Besides, I've been warned against sailors. I got to go. There's the madam. Thanks for helping me."

Orson stood for a moment watching the place, and the smile of the hunter hovered about his lips. Taking a turn about the block, he came back from the opposite direction and walked directly up to the door of the house and rang the bell. A sharp-faced old woman opened the door, and her beady eyes swept over him from top to toe in a lightning flash.

"I want room and board, ma'am," he announced, with his wallet already in hand.

"No room," she snapped, yet gazed lingeringly at the wallet.

"You can board me, can't you?" he persisted. "I don't care about a room so much. I have to eat near my work, and that's near here."

The lady thought that could be managed; and

five minutes later Val Orson was hurrying back to the ship to tell Mr. Martin about the crew prospects, and also to dress himself all over again with greater care so that he might appear at table in his new boarding house to the best advantage.

At noontime he found out her name was Nancy Prouse. When she served his coffee, he squeezed her hand. At supper another girl, greasy from the kitchen, served the table; and the landlady asked him casually how long he expected to eat there.

Val Orson laughed and left. But he waited in the street until midnight, scarcely believing until then that the girl had told him the truth when she said she did not come out at night.

When another day appeared the *Kestrel's* lading was complete; and Val Orson forgot about women in the sharper battle of wits that was precipitated in securing his crew. It was no use sending Martin out. Martin could get men until he named the ship. So, leaving him to choose a second mate, stating as the only requirement that the junior officer must have brawn though lacking brains, Orson went to the crimps for men. Of Mr. Martin he was assured. The mate might have some of the caution of a married man at sea, but it did not extend to his handling of men. Mr. Martin was a real chief mate at least; no crew scared him easily.

But even the crimps were not enthusiastic. At one place Orson found six men just out of jail. One was an ex-parson, the toughest of the lot. Money

was left with that crimp to keep the six men stupefied until the boat was ready for them. No crew would be shipped until the *Kestrel* had hauled out to her anchor to wait for the tug. It was unsafe to put crews aboard of hell-ships at the dock while conscious.

By nightfall of the evening before sailing day, the *Kestrel* still lacked men, and Orson took his new second mate ashore after the ship was anchored, to round up the men he lacked. The second mate was a beefy young giant called Ringlin, and was young enough to have decided that Val Orson did not look very formidable. He rather fancied himself. And when, after an hour of rounding up sailortown, the launch that had been hired to cart the men out to the ship contained all the men required except one, mainly through the efforts of Ringlin, Orson was getting hot under the collar from the youth's self-praise.

"You talk a bit windy, Mister Ringlin. Wait 'til you're at sea," he said sharply, and more than one meaning might be read into the advice. Ringlin was very young.

"I never saw the man I couldn't handle, Cap'n Orson, at sea or ashore," the second mate retorted. Orson grunted. They were at the launch landing again, and had almost decided to put off a man short rather than risk losing some of the men in the boat who might come to life at any moment. The waterside was deserted. If a policeman had shown

himself there might have been one more mysterious disappearance chronicled in the morning papers. But not even a night prowler appeared, although the hour was not yet late. There was a fog drifting in over the bay and it had a chill in it which sent folks to cover unless they had business outside.

Just when Orson was about to step into the boat, to leave the land for many a long day, he caught a fleeting glimpse of a shadowy figure lurking in the vague space behind the mill. He started toward it, for a man was a man when a clipper was bound to sea. Then he made out two shapes, and Ringlin joined him. Together they walked rapidly to the corner of the mill, around which the two figures had dodged; and swiftly the bigger of the two leaped upon Orson with a snarl and a flash of steel just as Ringlin plunged forward and grabbed the smaller figure.

It was dark. But even while trying to parry a vicious knife stroke aimed at his throat, Orson recognized the Greek sailor he had seen several times along with the Malay woman. The knife pricked him; but his powerful fingers had caught the stabbing hand, his free hand was already at the bent elbow, exerting a terrible twisting pressure. A shriek and a yell came out of the mist beyond the mill building, and at the moment when the Greek tumbled over cursing and groaning with the agony of a broken arm, Mr. Ringlin blundered forward holding a wounded hand and muttering darkly.

"It was a hellcat of a nigger gal! She bit me!" he grumbled, not quite as cocksure as he had been. Orson let go the Greek and kicked him contemptuously on the ground.

"Here's the man we want. Chuck him into the boat. I'll mend his arm at sea, and then teach him a few knife tricks."

Bidding the second mate haul off shore in the boat and wait for him, Orson strode off toward the street of the boarding house; for the encounter had reminded him of women, and he realized with something of a shock that he had almost gone to sea leaving behind him a girl who had spurned his rapid-fire love making.

How he was to reach the girl he had little idea. The old dragon seemed well able to protect her maids. But as a first step toward the desired end the skipper boldly knocked at the front door and declared to the old lady that he had left some valuable papers on the table at lunch on the day he ate there. Knowledge of any such thing was strenuously denied. He asked to see Nancy Prouse. He made his statements with such stern gravity that the landlady had no thought of opposing his inquiry.

"You'll have to see her in the morning," she said.

"But I'm going to sea in the morning!" he returned.

"Then you must wait until she comes back. She's gone to the movies with the kitchen-maid."

"You'll lose her, letting her run loose like that,"

Orson laughed softly. "She told me you never let her go out nights."

"I don't, with men!" the old girl snapped. "Have a seat."

"Thanks. I'll wait outside. It's fresher."

Chuckling over his good luck, Val Orson stood in the drifting mist watching the street with sea sharpened vision. He remembered that kitchen-maid. She had served the last meal he ate in the house, and had given a greasy, come-hither grin when he gave her a quarter tip.

And when the girls suddenly appeared, hurrying home, and he accosted them, it was to the kitchen-maid he addressed himself.

"I've been to the house, to see about some papers I left on the table when I ate there. The old lady told me to wait and see you girls. I'll go in with you. Here, wait a minute." As if on an impulse, he took some money from his pocket, and held out a dollar. "Before we go in, run down the street and buy some ice-cream for yourselves. You go," he thrust the money at the kitchen-maid. "You know the ropes best. And I want to say something to Nancy."

The money was taken and the girl was away in a twinkling, before Nancy had time to think. Anyhow, she could come to no harm there almost in front of the house. She simpered a little when Orson leaned over and whispered in her ear. Then, far swifter than she had believed a human being

could move, Orson stooped, picked up her coat hem and dragged it over her head, and gathered her into his arms like a baby.

Out of the fog by the mill Mr. Ringlin heard a sharp hail; and when he backed the launch to the steps Val Orson stepped into it like a conqueror, bearing his kicking bundle in his arms and offering no word except the command to get out to the ship.

CHAPTER VI

SEAWARD

HALF-WAY out to the ship the skipper halted the launch, hearing the noise of another launch in the fog. Farther away there came at intervals the sonorous booming of ferry steamers. Now and then an anchored sailing ship clattered her bell. Orson could distinguish the *Kestrel's* bell among all the rest; it had a tingling, half-tremulous note, like the cry of the kestrel at mating time.

There seemed to be no reason for uneasiness. The launch owner, who drove many a trip between ship and shore at a rate which paid for his vocal discretion, stopped as ordered, started when told, saw nothing, heard nothing, except those things necessary for the safe navigation of his launch, and sat at the wheel and controls of his boat like an image. He had seen nothing to remark about in the groaning Greek with the broken arm; or the half-score stupefied men who had already shown signs of coming to life out of the drugged liquor stupor that had won them to the *Kestrel's* brood. What Orson had enveloped in the bundle he carried was not hard to guess; but even a kicking woman was nothing to be fussy about when a ship was going to sea.

"Go ahead slow," Orson commanded when the other launch's exhaust had died away in the distance. Near the *Kestrel* the skipper ordered another halt. Another launch was heard speeding out from the shore. Lying motionless in the fog, Orson listened keenly, for he had lived many a year in a storm center formed of hostile men and the fruit of their hostility. Every crew he carried home was a potential mess of trouble. Experience had taught him that such trouble was just as well taken care of at its inception, by his methods, as by waiting through the tedious process of legal inquiry. Strangely, he only thought of possible trouble now as due to his carrying off of the Greek. He had detected the antipathy of the Greek consular agent who drank his Java wine. And knowing the little brown Malay woman better than anybody else knew her, with all due regard to the smug mission emissary he had dumped overboard, Orson believed that she had perhaps set the police on his trail after seeing him hurl the broken armed Greek sailorman into the launch.

There was no doubt this time. The launch from shoreward sped past, and in the direction of the *Kestrel's* tremulous bell. It stopped there. Orson sat all tensed like a hawk about to cast, and when the callow second mate opened his mouth to say something vacuous his utterance was shut off by a word so crisply shot at him as to make his wide ears tingle. The *Kestrel's* bell clattered out again,

five seconds of musical clangor, and it was so near that the sounds of the speeding launch suddenly coming to a halt against her side were heard in the motionless launch which carried Orson's miscellaneous crew.

For five full minutes the fog smothered the scene, and muted the voices in Orson's boat. Then from the *Kestrel* there was heard Mr. Martin's irritable voice raised in vehement protest.

"I tell you Captain Orson is ashore! We sail on the morning tide. There's no woman aboard, and I hope to God there ain't goin' to be."

Sounds of a launch starting shattered the foggy silence. Abruptly through the murk a fleeting shape appeared. The Greek sailor uttered a yell, which Orson only partially stopped. Then a moment of dire silence when that Greek's life hung in the balance. The launch from the ship sped on. The Greek's cry had been overborne by the noise of the exhaust.

"Start her up!" gritted Orson then, and the hired boatman sent his craft alongside the gangway with a gladsome bang. Police examinations meant little, many times; but nobody invited them.

While the cook, the steward, and the two youngsters who had shipped to test the caliber of a hell ship master, swayed aboard the launch's half conscious freight, Mr. Martin apprised Orson of a serious charge that had been made against the ship.

"They had the description of you all right, sir,"

Martin said with the least possible note of satisfaction in his tone. "Said you picked up a girl and run her to your boat. Good job you wasn't aboard. They'd have held up the ship. They'll do it yet if they don't find that girl. They know your character, sir."

Orson grinned. In the darkness the men were hauling in over the rail bundle after bundle of muttering humanity. The Greek could not climb the Jacob's ladder unaided, and a rope was put about him. Orson had left the muffled girl on the seat with a piece of line around her, telling the launchman to hitch on the tackle when it came his way. As Martin finished telling him his doleful tale, the bundle which was Nancy Prouse came up over the rail and was swung inboard. Then Orson moved.

Gathering the girl into his arms regardless of which end came uppermost, he strode up the poop ladder with her, barking out his orders as he went.

"Kick life into enough hands to get the anchor and we'll pull out now on the ebb," he said. Mr. Martin stared into the darkness, but there was no after remark. He knew Orson. He had no particular love for weird stunts, such as sailing to sea in a thick fog with little wind; but there was no argument fit to oppose to an order uttered by such a superseaman as the man who had driven the old *Kestrel* home to beat a record, and Mr. Martin turned abruptly upon young Mr. Ringlin, bidding him stir the hands to life.

Orson bore his struggling burden to his stateroom and bundled it into the bed. There was a faint glow in the room from the swinging lamp over the saloon table, and by it he untangled the clothes from the girl's head. He laughed at her frightened face, and pinched her cheeks; she panted, and her eyes stared up at him in terror.

"Don't be scared, Nancy," he told her, while she shrank from his touch, shivering like a frightened puppy. "You're my sweetie for this voyage. You'll like me when you get used to me. All girls do."

He left her, locking the door on her, and hurried on deck to take his ship to sea. Tom Godwin and Ed Norris, the young daredevils who had shipped to test the toughness of Orson, were aloft casting off the gaskets. They were the only members of the *Kestrel's* crew fit to go aloft. The rest carried a stupendous load; for no ordinary state of drunkenness ever incapacitated a deep waterman from blundering aloft if driven there. Mr. Martin profanely herded a doleful crew of staggering men to the windlass, putting their hands to the brakes, making them heave their weight at least by dint of fist and foot. Ringlin, the cocksure second mate, not quite so boisterously cocksure since that experience behind the mill, picked out the gear for getting the topsails set and put it into the hopeless hands of other doleful creatures who were fit for nothing but sleep.

Orson stood aft, listening intently. He had or-

dered the stopping of the fog bell; and to an inquiry concerning sailing lights he returned a curt negative answer. The laborious click-click of the windlass as the chain crept in was like rifle fire on the foggy air. Orson knew it could be heard half a mile away. He heard the exhaust of motor-boats, and the whistles of steam vessels creeping across the blind bay. A man upon the fore lower topsail yard sang out that his sail was ready for sheeting home and Orson barked back savagely:

"God damn you for a noisy swine! Come down and report your sail loose!"

There were six jailbirds among the sullen crowd with the second mate; and among the six was the dissolute ex-clergyman. He was, if possible, drunker than the rest, but carried his liquor as it was once said a gentleman carried it. He kept it inside him, and did not fall down. He stepped out from the gang with a ludicrous gravity, and pointed aft at the skipper.

"You are a bad man, captain. Your words reveal an evil soul. I will wrestle with the Lord for your salvation when we have set these hell blasted top'ls."

Orson laughed. It was easy to identify that man. But for the present there was altogether too much delay in getting the ship to sea, and motor-boats were becoming too noisy. Incapable though the crew might be, sheer weight dragged in the cable slack, and the anchor had not been down long

enough to be deeply buried. A smart round of heaving would break it out, and getting it on board was something that could be done at leisure while the ship sailed out. Orson stepped to the head of the poop ladder impatiently. The click of the windlass was so slow and regular that it sounded out across the misty night startlingly clear. It was impossible that denizens of the shore front could long remain oblivious of the fact that a ship was going to sea in a fog so thick that one street light could not be seen from another. With a police launch already on the watch, moments were precious. And as the skipper paused, unwilling to leave the poop yet, while so much depended upon the alertness of the watch he kept, a deep throated steam siren boomed out so close to the ship that he could hear the crackling of the steam. At the same time he heard the swish of parted water at the stem of a great ocean liner at half speed. And the fog was suddenly yellow; then the glow divided itself for an instant into three rows of golden portholes ablaze with light.

The tremendous disturbance of the water made the old *Krestrel* sway gently. She heaved, and her lifting bow dragged the anchor from the mud as the golden ports faded into a glow, and the glow vanished again in the murky gray. There was a breeze, which broke up the fog into swirls and drove it in damp masses athwart the decks, saturating the miserable wretches at the brakes and top-

sail gear. Out of the fast-moving mists that had been disturbed by the steamer's passing, came excited voices, and Orson knew that the officer on that steamer's bridge had received such a shock in the near collision that they must surely report it as soon as the shore boat took their lines.

Reaching the main deck in two jumps he seized Ringlin by the arm.

"Take your gang and help rattle in that cable lively. Rouse out that Greek with the broken arm. He can steer. God damn him. Send him aft. Dig out the steward too. Never mind making sail. Get the ship free o' the bottom, and we'll make sail as we drift."

Again Orson listened over the shoreward rail. The liner was anchoring for the night. Her cable crashed out, and her engine room telegraph could be heard. Soon there sounded the staccato barking of several motor-boats around her. Soon there would be one of those motor-boats heading out toward the *Kestrel* again. Men stumbled onto the forecastle head to join the windlass gang; and the cable began to come in faster under the combined drive of both mates. The Greek sailor shambled past Orson, stepping wide of him, watching him fearfully. The Greek was sober, and could estimate very closely the measure of his own security.

"Go to the wheel!" Orson snarled, and walked aft behind the man, who reached the poop on the

run, his broken arm swinging agonizingly by his side.

Down below the skipper dragged the steward from his bed and drove him on deck. He tried the door of his own stateroom, listening for sounds inside. There was no sound. Val Orson felt satisfied that Nancy Prouse had accepted the situation, and was no doubt sleeping peacefully.

Presently a man ran barefooted from forward, and Orson, emerging from below, met him at the ladder. It was Norris.

"Anchors away, sir," the man reported quietly, and waited for orders. Orson answered as quietly:

"Tell Mr. Martin to run it up to the hawse pipe and make sail. Get the inner jib set, and haul the sheet down to port to help her around."

Norris returned forward with a conviction that of all the tough blood boat skippers, Cap Orson was the softest. A Greek helmsman kept silent behind clenched teeth, and had a different opinion. Forward in the fog the rattle of jib hanks and the fluttering of canvas preceded the slow swinging of the ship's head as the sail was hoisted and backed. Then the backed foretopsail caught the breeze, and the ship turned faster. In five minutes the *Kestrel* was moving slowly through the water, and in five more her foreyards were hauled around to catch the fair slant that blew to seaward.

Slowly she moved; faster as each sail was added and trimmed. Orson stood close beside the Greek;

but that was never necessary as a safeguard against treachery. The Greek had much of the wisdom of his country's classic sages. He might contemplate reprisal; but not with a broken arm; nor did he propose to risk getting another arm broken. He obeyed orders with close precision, and Orson speedily realized that fact. It gave him more time to listen for signs which might portend trouble.

Soon they came, those signs. Out of the shoreward fog came the angry exhaust of a speeding launch; soon a peremptory hail shot out at the ship; though the *Kestrel* bore no lights, nor made a sound other than the creaking of her gear and the soft lapping of gently tumbling waters under her counter, that launch was steered by somebody with an uncanny sense of perception. Nobody answered the hail; and then the motor-boat stopped, right at the spot where the ship's anchor had but recently been raised. The throttled engine could be heard, gradually receding in distance as the launch circled the spot; then the exhaust started firing again, and the sounds increased, as if somebody had heard the slight sounds of the *Kestrel's* flight and was directing the pursuit.

"Can you feel the wind on your face?" Orson murmured in the ear of the Greek. And at the muttered affirmative: "Then steady as she goes, and watch yer steering!"

Gathering up a coil of small line from the mizzen pinrail, the skipper leaned over the side and peered

into the sternward darkness. Voices could now be heard above the rush of the motor-boat; and very soon that peremptory hail rang out once more. "*Kestrel* ahoy! In the name o' the law, stop!"

Orson smothered a curse; but there was utter good humor and willingness to oblige in his voice when he answered;

"Is that a police boat? Come alongside and I'll give ye a line. Don't care to anchor right here unless I have to. Stand by to catch this line."

The motor-boat shot out of the fog and ranged alongside. Orson threw his line, and somebody caught it. Then the motor was shut off, and the line tautened as it took the boat's weight and began to tow it. The old *Kestrel* was beginning to move subtly fast, ghosting through the smooth water like a yacht. Orson gripped the steward, sneaking past to go below.

"Run for'ard and tell the mate to set the fore and main courses and t'gallants'ls, and *to take no notice o' what I yell!*"

As soon as the frightened steward had gone the skipper bawled loudly:

"Take in the upper topsails, Mister Martin. Look alive. And have all hands mustered on deck. The police are here after somebody. Bring aft that jailbird parson. Doubtless it's him."

The gear began to squeal and thunder as the heavy courses fell and were sheeted home. The men in the launch hauled up on the line the skipper had

thrown, while he, at the rail above them, begged them to be patient while he got a ladder rigged for them. Then, when the ship moved still faster under the added sail, he watched the launch until she sheered a bit wide of the dark hull, and swiftly cast loose and threw into it the inboard end of the line she towed with.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen! I'll back my mainyards for you!" roared Orson as the launch vanished in the gloom again and the old *Kestrel* sped on.

Voices seemed to be raised excitedly in the launch. It was some minutes before the noise of her exhaust was heard. By which time the *Kestrel* had gathered speed which mocked at the efforts of the launch to overtake her. That exhaust never got any nearer. Voices which threatened many things dwindled away on the night.

Orson gave the helmsmen a course which would carry the ship wide of the direction in which she would be sought, then left the deck in charge of Mr. Martin and went below. He had almost forgotten his love-bird imprisoned down there in his cage; but the police boat reminded him, and he unlocked his stateroom door with a mild sort of wonder how he would find Nancy Prouse.

At first there seemed to be a queer feeling in the atmosphere of the little apartment. He had ordered the cabin lights to be put out. Now he took a flashlight from his pocket and switched it on; and his heart gave a leap of amazement. Nancy Prouse

had managed to solve the mystery of the porthole. She had opened the circular window, and was now stuck midway of the opening, her hips alone having prevented her completing her exit. Orson had not expected that much spirit in her. He grinned with much relish as he coolly hauled her back inside.

"Well, if you ain't a plucky wench!" he exclaimed, sitting down on the settee and regarding her curiously.

PART II

CHAPTER VII

THE PROMISE

No doubt Nancy Prouse was badly frightened. She crouched on the cabin floor and stared up at him. Her eyes were big and round. Altogether there was an attitude of rustic simplicity about her that intrigued Orson. She had been very desperately trying to jam her body through that porthole to almost certain death to escape him, and that alone stamped the girl as a new and astonishing type. Val Orson had known many women. He had known them from precocious adolescence clear through to over maturity; good women, frankly bad women, women of native innocence and women who were born without innocence. He had never before encountered a girl, so palpably healthy and alluring of body as Nancy Prouse, who actually preferred to try to drown herself in a foggy sea rather than accept the honor of his preference. True, the little Malay spitfire he had brought home the previous voyage was no bargain of submission at first; but it was no such foolishness as self-immolation that she tried. She had tried to murder her ravisher; had almost succeeded, as Orson thoughtfully recalled, tenderly running his fingers down the tremendous scar on his brow; but by the end of the

voyage he had tamed her very thoroughly indeed. He had rarely brought a conquest to so satisfying a conclusion. The very savagery of her had added piquancy to the intrigue. But here was a girl who puzzled him.

"What are you scared about, Nancy?" he grinned. He leaned over and laid a hand on her white shoulder. The clothes had been torn from her in squeezing through the brass-rimmed porthole. She shivered and drew back, holding her dress together with a tense hand.

Nancy Prouse was not over intelligent, perhaps; but she had been taught from childhood, that a poor girl possesses one treasure, to be tenaciously held on to as long as she expects to be called an honest girl. That teaching was reflected in her darkly gleaming eyes and every line of her shivering body as she answered him in a low, vibrant tone.

"You mean to ruin me. But you won't. I'll kill myself if you touch me."

"Well, well, little sweetness! Honest to goodness virtuous, ain't you? Who'd ever ha' thought to find such a pearl? You and me'll have to have a little chat, Nancy. Get up, lass, and let's look you over again. Hell, I wouldn't hurt you. I want to show you a good time, see you laugh, hear you sing."

Orson gripped the girl by the arm and hauled her to her feet. As he swung her toward him, leaning to gather her to him in a fierce embrace, his eyes

glittering and his lips puckered for a kiss, she tore loose, leaving all of one sleeve and half of her dress in his grasp, and climbed over the bed again, headed for the porthole. Orson chuckled. A new experience was something he had scarcely hoped for. There would be some kick to the subjugation of this one. He coolly seized her once more around the waist and pulled her back. Before he could begin what he meant to say to her, uproar broke out overhead; there were shouts; heavy steps sounded on the companionway stairs, and the second mate knocked on the stateroom door and shouted his message.

"The crew's threatening to turn the ship back and give you to the police, sir! It's that parson! The mate and me can't handle 'em, sir. Better come up."

Orson cursed softly. If he left that girl—and if he didn't—

"I'll be right up!" he roared through the door, and the second mate returned to the deck jumping. Orson turned to Nancy and did not attempt to touch her now. He looked straight into her eyes with a queerly soothing smile. It was one of his special tricks, but Nancy only learned that much later. For the moment she glared back at him. But as he spoke her fright died and gave place to unbelief; then to dawning wonder; a blush slowly spread over her dully pretty face.

"Nancy, you mustn't ever talk of killing yourself, my lass. You don't think I would harm a

pretty girl like you, surely? You got me wrong." A tremendous jest had incubated in his fertile brain in the past few minutes, since Ringlin's report. "I wanted you the first time I saw you. You were shy. There wasn't time to court you, Nancy, so I just eloped with you. You rest up and get the smiles back to your pretty face. I got a parson aboard who'll marry us as soon as I quiet them blasted fo'c'stle rats o' mine. Anyway, don't cry any more. I hate a red nose on a girl."

Orson left her. He did not know whether he might expect to find her when he returned, or how. But as he turned in closing the stateroom door behind him he caught a flash of a girl peering in the mirror, dabbing at a nose which was by no means red, and looking anxiously for the truth.

He chuckled as he leaped up the stairs. On deck there was no time to chuckle. The entire crew forward, with the exceptions of Godwin and Norris, and the broken armed Greek at the helm, mobbed the mates at the braces, which had been let run, and the ship slopped idly on the sea, fanning the fog, her progress stopped. Just one glance was needed to show Orson how things stood, although the main-deck was almost invisible in the foggy murk. But there was the Greek at his post. On the monkey bridge, where they had no business to be, Norris and Godwin leaned over the rail grinning down at the fracas. Orson caught sight of them first of all when his glance turned from the helm.

"You joined to see how tough Val Orson was!" he snarled. "One o' you relieve the Greek, the other fix up his arm. That'll take care of all the sober rats. If you want to see how tough I am, one o' you just disobey that order!"

Without a further glance at the three men, splendid in his contempt, Orson leaped down the ladder and plunged through the mob surrounding the two mates.

Her way stopped by the letting go of all braces, the ship rode gently on an easy swell; her yards swung, gathering momentum with every swing, clashing the gear, making windy thunder with the flogging sails. All around her the sea lay smothered in fog which drifted in masses all threaded with silver cobwebs, driven on the breath of a growing breeze. There was nothing visible to show how the *Kestrel* headed; but there was no sound near by to indicate undue nearness to danger either of land or launch. Orson could dimly make out the milling figures at the rail; and it seemed to him that all the trouble was being made by two or three men less drunk than the rest. All the others simply followed the natural inclination of a sobering shanghaied sailor in wanting to hammer officers who were probably contemplating hammering them.

"Ringlin, separate two rats from the pack and make 'em haul the braces!" snapped Orson, shouldering the nearest man heavily, who spilled two

more men with his fall. "Martin, take those two men from the deck and make 'em haul. Leave the rest to me!"

While jerking out his orders, Val Orson methodically went to work on the indistinct faces nearest him. He had seen no steel or other weapons; he needed none himself then. Shrewdly he contrived to tackle first the less warlike wretches who only followed more doughty leaders. Chief of the leaders was the ex-parson who had already been marked out for future attention. The other more prominent leaders were jailbirds who should have known better than to try to turn the ship back harborward where the police were nosing the fog for her master.

With the cold ferocity of calculated hate Orson barefisted the men. Until the mutiny was quelled he was the killer in spirit. Clumsy fists struck him and slipped from him. A booted foot struck his knee, foiled in a graver attempt by Orson's restless agility. Three brutal faces, scarcely human in their half consciousness, jerked back from Orson's savage fists streaming red. And since boots were being used, the skipper's boots completed what his fists had started on those three. Then he faced the actual leaders. They struck him hard, and with expert direction. Two there were who crowded him. He was grinning as they backed him to the bulwarks. All about was the whining of blocks as the braces were gathered in. The thunder of the empty

canvas gradually ceased, and the great sails filled; the ship moved through the water again.

Orson was being crowded. But he had well earned his name. He ducked under one swing, gripping the nearest man with both hands by the throat. Then he brought up his head, and the face above his hands was a smear that would never be the same face any more. Now he laughed aloud, and the second man backed away. That was futile. Man after man had slunk away to join the men following the mates. The ex-parson was dodging around, seeking a chance to get in one lusty stroke at the fighting skipper. But Orson had other ideas. He swiftly darted forward and swung the second man between himself and the parson; and with the deadly certainty of a cobra's stroke repeated what he had dealt the last man. Then Orson's laugh was positively sunny as he slithered forward on agile feet and reached out for the ex-parson.

"Come here, Holy Joe!" he invited. "I wouldn't hurt a hair o' your head—yet. If you don't stop right where you are, I'll change my mind." Suddenly leaping, he fastened his hands on the frightened rascal and brought him to a halt at the midship house. "I've got a little job that's right in your line," he grinned. "Stop shivering, you yellow rat. There's grog in this."

That ex-parson was a cunning scoundrel. He had experienced most of the sharper edges of life; he had told his fellow men all about hell fire and dam-

nation; he had betrayed his trust in that doubtfully useful direction; he had invited contributions for the building of a great edifice to the glory of God, and had spent the funds to the glorification of sundry women of no glory whatever and remarkably little virtue. Then jail, and release, and a natural gravitation to his true level, which he found among the crimps of the waterfront, to be discovered at last in his real character and in turn be made a chattel by those same crimps. In half a dozen voyages he had stirred up half a dozen rows. A beating rarely meant anything to him, because he was cunning enough to see to it that others got the worst of the beatings. In this *Kestrel* affair he had stirred up something in bravado which he had seen was too much for him as soon as it was started. But he had contrived to let others get hammered. It was only when Val Orson showed his real quality that the prime instigator of strife began to be sorry for himself. He had prepared himself for a painful experience, with a silent resolution that he would profit by it. And here was the notorious Val Orson, whose name was most obviously thoroughly merited not only assuring him of immunity but suggesting grog into the bargain. And how the once Reverend Peter Groves craved grog at that moment!

"I want you to do a job for me in the saloon," Orson said. "Stand here a minute. Don't move, if you hate sore bones."

The skipper jammed the man against the ladder,

and ran up to the poop to take a comprehensive survey of the ship. Whatever else might be said or suggested about Val Orson, nobody had ever dared or thought to say that he was anything less than a first rate seaman, a complete shipmaster. His first thought in that moment, when his ship was beginning to nose her way briskly through the dispersing fog, was far less of himself and the authorities he had flouted without any better reason than his unconquerable passion for female society, than of the ship herself. Her safety meant more to him than his own safety which her peril might jeopardize. While he scrutinized every aspect of the situation, he forgot utterly that there was anything in woman's shape aboard, and saw only that his fine old *Kestrel* was again in free flight.

On the saloon skylight sat the Greek. So swiftly had the uprising been quelled, that the setting of that broken arm and the bandaging of it was only just being completed. Whatever had been the skill of Norris, the arm was slung in a fashion, and the Greek had a pallid greenish tint in the misty glow that filtered through the skylight glass. Norris stood aside to let Orson examine the amateur surgery. Godwin steered, and there was a contemplative rather than a calculating expression in his eyes as he glanced up from the binnacle to meet the eye of Norris.

Down on the main deck the two mates drove the wretched crew to brace after brace, and sheet after

sheet. First they had so trimmed the yards that the ship would sail and steer. Then they drove the gang all around again, more closely adjusting brace and sheet. After the trim was perfect, the mates bullydamned the poor scum that had presumed to stage a sailing day fracas, and drove them to every halyard, sweating up and swinging down until the worn-out crew had no more fight in them.

All around the ship the gray sea heaved. The breeze blew fresh and fair off the land. Every minute it freshened. There was a faint, distant, occasional sound of a lighthouse fog signal. Somewhere beyond either fog or sound of horn boomed infrequently the warning of a steamer groping her way through the murk to harbor. Orson stepped to the wheel, Godwin glanced at his head as he leaned in front of him, and there was something of contemplation too in the glance. It really seemed, just then, as if the two bold men who had shipped ostensibly to challenge the supremacy of Val Orson had both come to the conclusion that the challenge was, at least, untimely.

"Bring her a full point to the south'ard, and steady her," was the order. Then Orson left the binnacle to bawl to the mates. One was to take charge of the ship, the other was to brace in the yards again all around. Mr. Martin came up the ladder, while Mr. Ringlin moved with relish among the fagged seamen, driving them to more weary lugging on the braces.

Without waiting to see how his orders were carried out, taking all for granted as was his habit, Val Orson called to the uncertain Groves shivering beneath the break of the poop, and on his appearance told him briefly:

"Get a Bible and come below. You're qualified to marry people, ain't you?"

The sorry ex-parson started, and stared. In all his devious career he perhaps had never experienced a shock just like that.

"Marry? Me?" he stammered, trying to grin. "Bible? Hell, captain, I haven't seen a Bible since last church service in San Quentin jail!"

"Get for'ard and find one then," retorted Orson. "Find the drunkest of the fo'c'stle rats. He'll have a Mission Bible. Get a move on. God damn you, get going!"

Val Orson experienced a refreshing thrill as he went down to his cabin. Now that his ship seemed safe for the moment, his interest was all centered on his newest woman. A cynical grin wreathed his lips at thought of the sacrilegious trick he contemplated; but then, as his hand closed on the door handle, the grin faded and gave place to a frown of conjecture. How would he find Nancy Prouse? Would he find her at all? He believed the porthole too small for her body to squirm through; but then he had never known a girl like Nancy. Such desperate virtue as would impel to self-drowning rather than submission to ravishment at his hands

might well overcome the comparatively trifling obstacle of space. He turned the key, pushing the door open, more curious than he would admit to ever having been before where a girl was concerned.

The light was low; shadows filled the stateroom. Orson's first glance was toward the open porthole, through which the silk curtains fluttered drawn by the eddies of air along the lee side. There was an ominous silence in the place. Orson's breath whistled softly through his clenched teeth as he stepped across to turn up the lamp. And a gentle, catching sigh broke the silence as his hand found the wick-stem. It sent a thrill to his taut nerve fibers. The untuneful whistle became simply a sharp intake of the breath. And he peered down through the stanchions of the bunk foot at the sleeping figure of Nancy.

A smile came back to his tense face. He leaned over her, his hands half outstretched as if to clasp her. And the light in his eyes glowed with a deep fire. The girl's eyes were smudged from her tears. There were faint dark shadows beneath them. Her lips trembled, as if she were dreaming of desperate moments. One almost childishly plump arm lay across her breast, moving as she breathed, and the fingers clutched together at her throat the torn rags of her dress. Even to the sophisticated eye of Val Orson she looked a veritable child. Suddenly, she awoke in terror to meet the devil in his eyes, and her lips opened to cry out. And then the spurious

minister appeared in the doorway, book in hand, and announced in artfully unctuous tones:

"I am ready to join you young people in holy matrimony. Has the bride anyone to give her away?"

Brazenly the Reverend Mr. Groves stepped over to where Nancy sat up affrighted in the bunk, and shook a wicked head at her. He took the girl's hand and assisted her to the floor, trying to catch her eye. But Nancy was simple enough to be deceived by the borrowed black overcoat and the borrowed collar, buttoned at the back, and the impressive Bible of the minister. She looked up shyly at the masterful man who had taken her because he wanted her, then kept her blushing face turned downward. She saw nothing of the wise glances that the two men exchanged as they arranged themselves for the ceremony, after calling in the steward to give away the bride.

CHAPTER VIII

HOLY WEDLOCK

WHILE Groves was conveying to Orson by sign, and with many a facial contortion, the discovery he had just made that the Bible he had secured was in Swedish and he did not understand the language, the girl tried with native nicety to arrange her torn garments. Nancy had been reared in rustic simplicity, of old-fashioned parents. She had been terrified at her abduction. But she really did not want to die. Nancy Prouse was young and healthy, with bounding pulses and awakening realization of sex. Fully realizing the tremendous helplessness of a girl in the situation that had enveloped her, the promise of marriage somewhat soothed her. Until she saw evidences of the truth of the promise she had not been entirely at ease; she had dreamed disquietingly as she had slept. But now she was satisfied that, even if she had been given no choice in getting a husband, she was getting well out of a bad predicament and securing at least a husband of some importance both in manhood and material standing. She had seen girls from the boarding house come home elated because a second mate had taken them to a movie. They had jeered at her for a little country mouse, assuring her that she was too slow,

that she might get a truckman or a soda clerk for a lover, but never a he-man or a man of substance. Now she felt rather thrilled. And she had never thought Orson particularly undesirable in the brief encounters she had run into with him up to the time he had bundled her up in her skirts and run off with her. Anyhow, paramount in Nancy's thoughts after all was the recognition that she was helpless in his hands. Her decision was not hard to come at. Since there was no doubt whatever that he meant to enjoy his game, she would at least make sure of his name. She waited with downcast head while Orson rummaged in his bureau for a ring. The steward was there, grinning, trying to catch her eye. He had heard all about Val Orson's little ways with women. But this was a new game he was playing. Groves stood with one finger between the pages of the Swedish Bible, also trying to convey a bold and suggestive smirk to the girl. Orson had contrived to make him understand that it made no difference what language he got married in. Groves knew that such a marriage as he was fitted to perform made no difference anyway. But as long as the girl didn't know that, nothing mattered.

"Here, steward, run along and get a galvanized grummet from the sailmaker. You know about the size o' the lady's finger."

Gravely the steward took Nancy's unresisting hand and estimated the size. He was gone and back again with the galvanized iron ring in five minutes,

and the ceremony proceeded. The once Reverend Peter Groves held his nose aloft, put on an air of extreme solemnity, and peered down his long nose at the unintelligible script dancing up from the page at his scarcely sober eyes.

The preamble to that marriage service was rattled off at a rate and in a gabble which precluded the understanding of one single word. But when, with hand upraised, Groves sonorously asked:

"Do you, Nancy Prouse, take this man for your lawful husband?"

Nancy answered with a little shiver of nervousness:

"I do."

"And do you, Valentine Orson, take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife, to have and to hold 'til death do you part, so help you God?"

"I do," grinned Orson, slipping on the ring without further ado and pushing the steward and Groves out of the stateroom at once. Groves attempted to resist. He had meant to kiss that shy little bride at least. If there was any fuss, he would soon tell her what her marriage was worth.

"Get outside," snapped Orson. "Steward, give this man a good hooker o' grog and let him get away for'ard."

Orson closed his door, and gathered Nancy into a close hug, kissing her hungrily. The girl was shivering. She accepted his hot kisses with closed eyes. It was nothing more than the natural perturbation

of an innocent girl for the first time in the arms of a masterful lover. The skipper laughed softly, and released her.

"Don't be scared, Nancy," he soothed, patting her shoulder. "I'm going on deck for half an hour. Cheer up, lass, and have a smile for your husband when he comes back."

Leaving her, Orson stepped to the stairway. At one side was the pantry, and there were voices there. The steward was saying rough things to somebody. Orson stepped over there at the sound of Groves' insolent retort, and gripped the clothes of the first man he reached.

"He won't get out, cap'n," the steward complained, trying to protect a jug of rum with an enveloping arm.

"You said I was to have some grog, didn't you, cap?" Groves countered impudently.

"I gave him a double shot already," the steward cried.

"Maybe you'll have more modest ideas when you shed this," snarled Orson, ripping off the collar that was buttoned at the back, and unbuttoning the borrowed black overcoat with one fierce sweep. "Get on deck!"

"Oh, I say, Cappy—" the rascal began, putting on a knowing smile and attempting a wink. He had never heard half of the truth about Orson, or he would never have dared that. The skipper's face darkened. Without a word he seized Groves by the

breast of his shirt with one hand, and slapped him on the smirking face with the open palm a dozen times so tremendously that the blood spurted from nose and mouth and the man hung limp in the terrific grip at his breast.

The steward stared in awe. Orson dragged the man up the companionway, and the steward followed step by step, still gazing after the suddenly awakened terror until the deck was reached and Orson flung Groves down the poop ladder to the main deck and bellowed for somebody to come aft and take him away. It was a thoughtful steward who went back to his pantry bed with many recently formed notions knocked to the winds.

The fog was still hanging over the sea when Orson got on deck. The breeze had freshened considerably, and the *Kestrel* leaned easily to it as she slipped fast through the small seas. The fog moved in walls and banks, drifting athwart the decks like ghosts in the darkness. No lights were to be seen about the ship other than the very faint binnacle glow and a glow which was a lighter shadow rather than a light coming up through the frosted glass of the skylight in the captain's stateroom. Orson smiled a little when he passed that skylight; but his attention thereafter while he was on deck was all for his beloved old ship. Listening intently, he tried to detect any sound which might indicate neighbors. The foghorn he had heard on the lighthouse had long been left astern; for the

ship sailed like a witch in the smooth water and already the patent log rotator was spinning with gratifying whirr.

A glance at the log and compass showed sufficient offing gained to dispose of any chance of a shore boat overtaking the ship. That course was not the course for the Horn; and Val Orson had designs on another record. He curtly ordered a change of course more to the southward, and bade the mate have the side lights put in the screens.

"Brace the yards up, Mister, and get the skysails and flying jib on her," he ordered. "Watch the steering, and watch the weather. I don't want sail taken off until I say so. You can pile on sail all you want. And keep the men jumping. Make the swine sweat until there's no fight left in 'em."

With a last glance around, the skipper stepped into the companionway chartroom. As he laid his ruler across the chart, and reached up to the book rack for Maury's passage book, his eyes darkened with a fervor greater than mere sex passion. He had left a brand new bride, fresh and shy, innocent and trembling, with every intention of making his absence and her loneliness as brief as possible. Now, poring over the track chart, casting a mental line over the route recommended by the great navigator, he had but one aim in the world, which was to drive the old *Kestrel* to another record which would fade the last one into utter insignificance.

For an hour he sat there, calculating winds and

currents, estimating whether extra distance sailed to find a good wind would be justified when the wind was found. Under the gimbaled lamp he saw the bulkhead working with the stress of the mizzenmast. The old ship vibrated, trembled with the power of her tremendous sail pressure. Every part of her old frame groaned and protested. Had there been a heavier sea running, the elemental sounds would have muted most of her complainings. Orson knew what the old ship was saying. But the old ship, like every other thing or creature, must yield to the terrific driving force which was the will of Val Orson. His teeth gleamed in the lamplight. With sure pencil he traced the course he had decided on. If winds, weather, and human endeavor could not keep her to that line, then she must be kept there by his own sleepless vigilance and consummate seamanship.

He had been away more than an hour when at last he opened the stateroom door and brought his thoughts back to his bride.

CHAPTER IX

TESTING A HARD CASE

By noon of the next day the *Kestrel* was flying south with rainbows of spray about her bows. Orson had been up on deck half a dozen times during the night to mark her progress, and each time he appeared his alert perception found some small alteration of trim which, followed out at his order, mended the ship's speed. At dawn he was out again, and the bosun gave him his sea-water bath from the headpump hose. Among the gang with the deck-scrubbing brooms were many bruised faces. Not many dared scowl while Orson stood there in his naked masculine splendor with the hissing brine cascading about him. But many a battered face lifted and grinned viciously as his glistening back rose up the poop ladder. Among the gang were the two bold youngsters who meant to see how tough a bucko Val Orson was. They had thoughtful faces. The crew of the *Kestrel* was more numerous than ever before, which was food for thought. None of the forecastle crowd would ever understand the pride that urged Orson to run his wage account perilously near to the line of average loss in order that his grand old clipper might be driven to the last knot of speed obtainable through

man power. And Norris and Godwin, believing as they did of Orson, could not at present conceive of such a man nursing a love for an ancient sailing ship that would rise superior to any other consideration on earth. They had seen something since sailing, and began to understand a little how Orson worked. But, full of the bubbling conceit of unbroken youth, they refused to see, yet, the efficacy of such methods in any case such as their own. And the greater the crew the greater the chance that, sometime soon, there would be a showdown in the wake of such tactics as Orson had followed so far.

At six o'clock Nancy Prouse appeared on deck, and a good many pairs of eyes turned her way. She seemed a little timorous as she stepped out upon the heavy deck and felt the strong breeze on her cheeks. Orson had dressed, and was scanning every bit of the ship's tall rigging through his binoculars. The second mate stood by, already red in the face from the scathing little criticisms that Orson let fall.

"Put the men to work aloft and let the decks go," Orson snapped at last. "Don't ever let me find a broken seizing or a roband missing again. This ship can sail. If she don't it's up to you and the mate. A useless mate don't belong aft. Understand?"

Ringlin had been of the same opinion as Norris and Godwin, until the episode behind the mill. Now he received the scarcely veiled threat of disrating

without showing more than a respectful acquiescence. And when Orson left him to go into the chartroom again, giving Nancy no more attention than if she had been a dockyard bollard instead of a rosy cheeked girl with blowy hair looking as if she might react very pleasantly to a smile, Ringlin roared to the bosun to knock off washing down decks and to send men aloft on each of the three masts to overhaul all robands and service. Water disappeared from the weathered old planks quickly. Age made the wood receptive. As much water soaked in as dried off. Already the carpenter was thumping away with calking iron and mallet to tighten the seams around the coamings of the fore hatch. He had noticed that leak when battening down the hatches before sailing. Men trudged forward with the brooms and squeegees, to get supplied with marline and ropeyarns for the new job; and Norris and Godwin ran back aft well ahead of the rest of the gang, curious to take a nearer view in daylight of the girl whom they had seen carried aboard in a bundle at night.

Nancy smiled as they grinned at her. After her terrors, the brilliant morning was a reviver, and the novelty of being on a ship in the midst of a shoreless sea pleased her simple mind. Her sturdy body and leaping blood were sufficient guarantees against seasickness; Nancy's imagination was scarcely powerful enough to make her ill against the bubbling healthiness of her body. And a great deal of

illness, at sea as ashore, is due to imagination. The two sailors stepped over to the mizzen rigging with their marline and ropeyarns. They had almost to touch her as they climbed to the sheerpole.

"Miss, it won't do for us to be seen talking to you, but if you're in trouble sing out. We'll be with you," Norris told her in a low tone. Godwin nodded agreement. The girl's big eyes followed them aloft. She had no idea what they were talking about. Orson came from the chartroom, not to join her, but to watch how his ship was bearing herself, and Nancy went to him and put a hand on his arm, looking up at him in innocent puzzlement.

"There isn't going to be any trouble, is there?" she asked.

"Trouble?" he echoed, with lifting brows. "What's put trouble in your head, girl?"

"Those two men up there—" pointing aloft to the mizzen topgallant yard—"said if I was in trouble to sing out and they would come to me."

Orson wore a grim expression as he identified the two men. Not many minutes ago he had caught sight of Groves, his face all bruised and swollen, and the swelling and the bruises had not been enough to disguise wholly the sinister threat in that face. It was not a very stiff problem to figure out that there might be a connection between that expression on Groves' face and the bold proffer of help from the two sailors. Undoubtedly the rascally ex-parson had told the whole forecastle of the

marriage. That might mean little to the men in general. They would probably think it a huge joke. But men of the caliber of Norris and Godwin would be likely to place more value upon the news.

"Listen to your husband, Nancy," Orson replied, patting her hand as it lay on his sleeve, "there won't be any trouble that'll trouble you. If you ever feel like singing out for help, shout to me. I'll handle all the trouble in this ship. Run below now and set the table for breakfast."

When the men came down from aloft for breakfast at eight bells, Orson stood at the mizzen pinrail until Godwin and Norris reached the deck. They passed boldly by him. They might easily have gone down by another way; there were mizzen stays that ran down to the main, and swarming either of them was no difficult job for a sailor. But these youths were full of the unchastened cockiness that takes no heed of mere warnings. They glanced at the skipper as they passed him. He said no word to them; his face was cold and disinterested; but they must have caught something in his eyes in that passing glance they gave him, for they hurried down the poop ladder and along the main deck with their eyes set straight ahead of them and no speech on their lips.

Long before noon that first day at sea the unhappy crew of the *Kestrel* received a fair intimation of how the voyage must go. The breeze that

had banished the fog in the night and sent the old ship groaning through leaping, sparkling seas, grew to a whistling half gale in the forenoon watch. Mr. Martin uneasily watched his flying kites as the sprays slashed across the heeling decks. Val Orson only watched the log, and the trim of his yards. There were moments when the lee waterways were afoam with green seas, and the scuppers spouted thick jets of brine half-way across the deck. The ancient spars creaked and whipped. They were kept standing more by the rigidly attended gear than by any of their remaining sturdiness of fiber. The skysails and royals, flying jib and upper staysails between masts were full of windy sunlight, ready to explode into flicking ribbons. All through the foaming clipper was a steady, rhythmic thrumming of stress that was almost at the breaking point.

"Mister Martin, she'll do better than this," Orson said after long scrutiny. "Check in the upper yards a trifle, and take in the flying jib." Martin's eyes glistened. Here was the notorious sail carrier, Val Orson, talking of taking in a sail while the sun still shone. But Orson was not yet done: "Too much headsail buries the lee bow and holds her back. Remember that in future."

There was a half hour when Orson never left the log dial after the changes had been made. The ship was surely making a half knot more speed. She was also showing it by the shrill squealing of stanchions and bulkheads. Getting on to eight bells, when

Orson got his sextant for the meridian observation, Chips emerged from his berth with the sounding rod and line, to sound the well. The second mate stood in the chartroom ready to relieve the deck. There were no assistant navigators on that flying *Kestrel.* Orson permitted neither Martin nor Ringlin to meddle with the reckoning. What would happen if he were taken sick, or had the sort of accident such a man is very likely to have with such a crew, never bothered the skipper. He possessed the spirit that makes commanders of men. Many a time had a crew watched Val Orson grow thin and haggard with gripping illness born of bad weather and weariness; the chance they had watched for had never come yet; Orson might burn himself up, but as long as one spark remained alight in his vitals he would so continue to blaze to the eternal defeat of his enemies. That spirit urged him to be the sole keeper of the ship's reckoning.

While he stood, hack watch in hand, waiting for the sun to come to meridian, sighting through his sextant tube every minute as time drew near, Chips knelt at the sounding pipe amidships, staring aft full of some great matter of ship's business yet not daring to out with it before the skipper ordered eight bells to be made. But the moment Orson had signalled to the mate to strike the bell, and the four mellow double strokes had clanged out on the rushing air, Chips got to his feet, gathered up his chalked and jointed rod, and staggered aft as fast as his

nervous knees would carry him. Orson entered the chartroom without giving Chips a glance. It was the mate to whom the report was made.

"She musta started a butt, or opened a seam, or somepin! There's two feet o' water, took on midship swing, too."

"When did you sound last?"

"Eight bells this mornin'. I believe she's wide open!"

Mr. Martin met the eye of the second mate, and grinned sourly. Ringlin was looking aloft at the cracking canvas when he was not shooting furtive glances through the chartroom door at the skipper over the chart table.

"It's Mr. Ringlin's watch. Report to him, Chips," said the mate, and took himself off below out of the way. Chips was for taking the report to the skipper in person; but Ringlin knew enough to prevent that. He turned Chips toward the ladder.

"Get for'ard and I'll send a pumping-gang to you," he said. "You and bosun spell each other while you get your dinner."

Chips trotted forward growling about leaky ships. The second mate waited for Orson to finish his calculations and prick off the ship's position. But the skipper, as soon as he had finished with the chart, took down an old record book and began to study the daily runs of the ship that had made the record he was out to beat. Two feet of water on

a level floor was serious, and Mr. Ringlin meant to spread the responsibility.

"Chips reports two feet o' water in the well, and making fast, sir," he spoke through the door.

"Start the pumps."

"Take in sail, sir?"

"Yes, if you're tired o' living aft! You've got men enough to pump her around the Horn. Make 'em sweat."

Orson returned to his book. Something occurred to him.

"Where's that Greek?" he asked.

"For'ard, sir. Too sick to turn-to."

"Bring him aft and make him steer. One arm's enough in this ladies' weather. I'll tell a man when he's to lay up."

All the afternoon watch the pumps clanked out their harsh refrain, and the water gushed across the deck steadily. Into the first dogwatch the cursing men pumped, and then the pump sucked at last. There had been no song to lighten the labor. There had been much throaty growling. When the men came on deck for the first dogwatch and found they had still to pump, there was something more than growling. Groves led a threatened chorus.

"You fellows let him ride you this early, and you'll smell hell all the passage! Make him take in sail."

"All right, you go tell him," came the retort from

one man whose features had been improved on during the night by the skipper's handiwork.

"Leave it to me, if you're not men enough," sneered Groves, with a sly glance at Norris. Godwin had gone aft to relieve the wheel. He was now coming for'ard again, leaving the Greek to steer another watch with his one arm.

"She's a heller, all right," Godwin announced, taking his place at the pump brakes and looking aft reflectively. "That dago has steered four hours now, and will stand another two if not more, without making a peep. Ought to see his eyes, though."

When, midway through the first dogwatch, the water was all out of the ship, the men were driven a weary round of halyards and sheets and braces, taking watch tackles and strops to sweat up gear already twanging taut. And the sea swirled about their legs in the waterways, the sprays struck them like shots while flattening the jibs on the forecastle head. They were wet through and sorehanded when at last they went to their miserable forecastle for supper. Breakfast and dinner had been eaten almost without noticing what they ate. Hunger was a sauce to some; a hangover opposed appetite in the rest. But now they were to discover just what the *Kestrel's* fare was to be. A young hand carried along the mess kids and coffee pot. And the men stood around and glared at the unhealthy slices of the same cold salt junk they had left at dinner time.

That, with hardtack, and bitter, muddy coffee was their evening meal after a day of back-breaking work.

"Damned if I'd stand it," said Groves, and added after a pause, "if I was hungry."

"What'd you do?" Norris inquired with curiosity.

"I'd take it aft and face the Old Man with it, if I was like some of you good little lads who didn't get thumped yet. Somebody whispered to me once that you and your mate there shipped in this hellship to see what Val Orson was made of. I'll show you what he's made of as soon as my face comes back in shape. If that kidnapping swine hadn't knocked my teeth crooked, I'd want supper, and I'd show you how to get it. But you windbags—"

"Let's go and brace him," said Godwin, gathering up the mess kid. "Who's coming?"

"Here. You don't want nobody else," cried the inevitable sea lawyer, hastily searching through his bunk and producing a booklet. "Here's the lawful scale o' perwisions, all wrote down. Show him that, chummy. He daresn't do nothing to yer. If he do, we'll all come aft when you sing out, won't we, mates?"

Norris and Godwin went aft with the meat, which thus early in the voyage offended the evening air in spite of the breeze. Orson had economized on stores in order to provide one or two more men. He had enough of a sort to adhere to the legal ration; but it was close cutting, and nobody knew better than

he that the first days of the voyage were certain, the last days most uncertain. He had seen the two men come aft, and when they halted at the bottom of the ladder he met them at the top.

CHAPTER X

"THE DEVIL'S FATHER"

THERE was something almost mysterious in the manner of Orson's disarming that complaint. As he met the two men, Nancy and the steward emerged from the cabin companionway, each with a dish, and started toward the galley. Orson halted them.

"What's the trouble?" he inquired civilly of the men.

"This!" retorted Godwin, thrusting forward his mess kid with the aromatic slices of hard beef. Godwin was short of temper in face of the skipper's supreme poise. He had expected an outburst; and was met with polite words. "This ain't what we signed on for, you know it."

Orson looked into the kid, smelled at the beef, and beckoned Nancy over. And he talked meanwhile, quietly, without heat.

"I forgot that you two men might remember signing on. My mistake. But as for the food, you have the same as I have. Here, Nancy, show 'em our beef. D'ye see, men, it's all out o' one cask. Only one sort o' stores in my ship. Fair sharings and no favors. But I told the doctor to make hash for you. The stooard and my wife is going to make hash for the cabin now. If you want hash instead of cold

beef, see the doctor, m'lads. Lay for'ard, now, and don't start trouble before it's due. Run along, Nancy, lass, and hurry our supper."

Nancy led the steward down the ladder past the malcontents with an air which she might previously have worn had she been suddenly promoted to the managership of the boarding house she served in.

The two bold sailor lads stared around after her in a sort of mystified daze. The girl appeared so palpably sure of herself, so content with her position, and the steward trotted so docilely after her that it was doubtful whether that boozy ex-parson-jailbird-seaman had told truth, or simply started a stirabout of trouble for them. And if Orson spoke truth about ordering the cook to make hash for the forecastle, the backbone of their complaint was broken; the mere aroma of deepwater salt horse was no cause for war; made into hash even the least tasty of salt meat could be made palatable to hungry sailors.

They turned and took the beef to the galley. Inside they found the doctor fuming, his small kitchen occupied by a blushingly anxious bride and a fussily eager steward grinding up meat and onions and potatoes.

"Here, Doctor!" growled Norris, shoving in the beef kids and almost knocking the cook's nose with the rim. "Old Man says the fo's'tle gets hash out o' this. Get a move on with it."

"Tell th' Old Man to come and make his blessed

hash!" snapped the doctor. "You can see how much chance I got."

"That's yer own funeral," Godwin cut in shortly. "The order was to give us hash for supper. You gave us cold hoss and hardtack. If hash ain't for'ard in an hour you'll have yer ears burning. And you'll bring it along yerself, too, savee? No able seaman's going to use up his dogwatch trotting back'ards and forrards over your damned laziness. Shake 'em up now."

Giving Nancy a sharply inquisitive glance as they left, the two sailors tramped forward to tell their mates that hash was the net result of their embassy, or would be when it was delivered. More growling greeted the report than it would seem a few pieces of rank beef warranted. But then it was ever the deep-waterman's sacred privilege to growl; and since they might no longer growl at the nature of the supper, they perforce growled at the delay.

"Did you tell 'im all about the lawful 'lowance like I told yer?" the sea lawyer wanted to know.

"Hell! I'll wager they didn't go to him at all, but bribed the doctor into making hash," the biting voice of Groves broke in from the gloom of his forward bunk.

"Never you mind what way we wangled it," snapped Godwin, rummaging for his pipe and lighting the dottle. "Hash'll be good for your loose teeth anyway. Maybe you won't have so many loose teeth at that if you keep on yapping."

"That's interestin'," sneered Groves. "How come?"

"You'll have 'em knocked out."

"The law sez no knockin' a bloke about and that goes fer for'ard as well as aft, me lads," the sea lawyer stated with the emphasis of one trying to make an impression upon men who might possibly at some time be tempted to do some knocking about upon himself. Sea lawyers have sailed the seas since the seas were sailed; and more than a fair proportion of them have suffered at the hands of rough shipmates whose respect for the law did not extend to amateur exponents of it.

Norris and Godwin smoked their pipes and ignored the little oracle. They did not ship in the old *Kestrel* to start a forecastle fracas; and the object of their real interest rather disarmed them by his unexpectedness than awed them by his terrors. Furthermore, they were not trouble makers. When they vowed that their reason for wishing to sign on in the *Kestrel* was to see for themselves just how tough a shipmaster had to be to earn such a name as Val Orson had got, they told the simple truth. They were the Castor and Pollux of the sea. For years they had shipped together or not at all. They fought on occasion with a joyous verve that carried the fight out of the class of a fight into the realms of Olympian sport. About the only times they sailed a traverse apart were in those moments of dalliance with the ladies of the seaports, and when they came

upon a boxing tournament in their wanderings. A girl was a one-man affair, anyhow. A boxing contest might develop into a final between them; and Godwin and Norris had never fought each other, nor wanted to, since the memorable sailortown fight that had brought them together.

As they smoked, they caught each other's eye, and a faint smirk might have been translated into a grin of understanding by intimates. Daylight still poured through the door, and the slight overhang of the forecastle-head kept the flying sprays from entering with the light. The forecastle was thunderous with the thud and roar of seas. Outside the door was the great wet arch of the foresail foot, dripping, booming with wind. Crashing seas burst against the clipper's rushing bows, and great sheets of water flew up and athwart the decks. The sky was as brilliantly blue as new Easter silk, and held no threat of ill weather. Yet the *Kestrel* groaned through all her frame; the decks worked; what the condition would be when she fought the vicious seas of Cape Stiff was a problem. A trickle of water ran across the floor between Godwin and Norris, and they both sought the source with their eyes. There was no leakage at the deck beams, which was wonderful; but the leak was seen to start at the eyes of the ship, which was disquieting. Right forward where the ceiling did not carry across the timbers clear to the stem, that trickle of water started. It was well above water-line, except when the ship

plunged into a sea. Watching closely, every dive the clipper took could be seen to bring in a spurt of water. Some of it went down between the timbers; some trickled across the forecastle floor.

Nothing in that to alarm the ordinary forecastle hand. Besides, supper was now long overdue. Men grumbled. They began to comment unguardedly about a certain pair o' young know-alls who took it upon themselves to carry the grub aft to complain, and now all hands had to wait for their supper until they were too hungry to smoke.

But they had little time to follow that line, for the doctor came dodging forward between sprays, carrying a mess kid covered with a dirty apron. His face was black with more than grime. The glance he shot at Norris and Godwin as he passed by them was eloquent enough to need no words. They grinned in cheerful response and joined the rest of the hungry gang with spoons and plates. The first man had put his spoon well around a fine big lump of hash, and was doing his best to work it so that he could get more than his whack without being detected. The cook never ceased growling until he left the door again, and then he growled harder all the way back to the galley. But before he reached that haven of security and warmth the hail pealed forth from the poop:

"Start the pumps again, Chips! Get all hands on it and rattle her free."

For a moment there was ominous silence in the

forecastle. The man at the hash kid crammed his mouth full, and the next man dug into the mass with his spoon, stealing a mouthful without putting it on his own plate first. Godwin reached forward and knocked the man's spoon from his hand; and the sea lawyer howled angrily:

"They carn't do it! They ain't got the right to starve us! The law sez—"

"Shake a leg! All hands to the pumps! Come on, lads, if you start a song you'll have her free in half an hour. Rise and shine, m' lads!" Chips and the bosun appeared in the doorway, puffing the last few mouthfuls of smoke from their pipes before turning to work. Cursing, the men followed them to the pumps.

"Somebody start a song," Chips urged, kneeling down with his sounding rod. "Now, me lads. Give us Sally Brown."

"Give yer a thick ear, y' bloody wood spoiler!" snarled the man who had stolen the hash, his lips bleeding from a spoon cut. He was not sure enough of himself yet to tackle the man who had hit that spoon from his hand.

"Come on, sons. Sooner it's done the sooner we eat cold hash," shouted Norris, and the pumps began their monotonous, weary grind as night came down cloudless, bright with stars, windy and full of the strong tang of the brine that flew.

It was an hour before the ship was free again. Then it was time to commence the first watch. Men

seethed with discontent. The Greek came forward at the change of the watch, having stood eight hours at the helm of the flying clipper with his one arm. His teeth were clenched tightly, and he smiled a fixed, mirthless grin that made men shiver as he passed them in the gleam of the lamp. He had nothing to say. He spooned cold hash into his plate and ate stolidly. His eyes were like black glass with red specks blown in at the back.

Aft, Val Orson stood at the weather rail bareheaded to the gale. He had eaten a hurried supper, sent Nancy to her stateroom, and returned to the deck immediately. While the men ground away at the pumps he listened to the clank-clank, scowling when it seemed to slacken in the moments when gangs were shifting. At every half hour he read the log himself. His glance at the compass was like the dart of a rapier. The Greek was luckier than he knew, in steering his one-handed trick so well. Then the skipper would enter the chartroom, and pore over a notebook which was full of transcribed figures from the book of records. Hour by hour as the night deepened, Orson's face grew brighter and keener. He spoke to nobody. But neither did he curse the helmsman when an unexpected sea broke at the ship's quarter and drenched all on the poop, Orson worst of all.

Until midnight he stood there. When the watches were changed again he briefly told the mate that the ship was doing well.

"Pump her every watch, Mister, as long as she strains. She's an hour ahead of record right now. But she can't carry water. Keep her free, Mister, and call me if it moderates."

That spanking gale lasted for three days, and men were too dog-weary with pumping to do more than fling themselves into wet bunks all dressed after their toil to snatch a few precious moments of rest before going to toil again. Nancy Prouse was a silent spectator of the ship's splendid performance, and she cared little what the scowling men who seemed always pumping water might be thinking; her whole soul was centered in that alert, tense figure who directed the ship's destiny, who seemed tireless, impervious to hunger even, who left his bed a dozen times nightly to face the chill wind so that his ship might lack nothing of seamanly guidance; centered in her man.

The girl's cheeks were brown above the roses, like ripe russet apples. Her eyes had the sparkle in them that had first of all attracted Orson. She was a living, breathing model of good health and buoyant spirit; and if she did not intrude upon the ship's outward affairs with idle feminine chatter, it was because she was too rapt in her own little universe, which began and ended in Val Orson. He was the universe, and the lord of it.

In the village where the girl had been reared folks still believed in God, and a wife was believed to be under the obligation to cleave to her husband until

death did them part. She had been too brief a time in the big city to have fallen for jazz and the bright lights. A few movie shows with another girl about tallied her experience of dissipation. When a love-story was flashed on the sheet she would sit with clasped hands, and head held sideways, sighing for the handsome hero, weeping with the disillusioned heroine, awed by the wicked machinations of the villain.

Now, in a new world, she was living her own little romance. She had already changed her ideas about the manner of her mating. Frightened at first, she had been lulled by the marriage ceremony. She had ceased to be afraid of Orson, and only regarded him now with a sort of youthful admiration; for while his ship sped gloriously on her way, Val Orson was a pleasant man to live with. For a wife, that is. His sailors might and probably did hold far different views. But toward Nancy he showed his better side. True, he spoke little; but he would stop to pinch her ear, or her cheek, pull her hair or shake her with mock savagery that was fascinating to a girl who had once persuaded herself that a cave man would be the acme of lovers. Poor foolish Nancy had no real conception of out-and-out brutality. The little twinges of pain Orson caused her satisfied her. They were to her the real thing. And, in other ways too, Val Orson was quite the complete husband. Nancy was satisfied.

The breeze died away, and persisted for days as

a tantalizing air with puffs which flattered only to deceive. The change worked a transformation in all the widely differing elements of the crew. While the pumps required to be manned every watch, men were so utterly weary that they ate and slept with tremendous zest, never caring that their food was bad or that their beds were wet. They had no time for growling seriously.

The customary growl that must accompany all tasks and which was a sign of well being in them, was heard at all times. But the more subdued, bitter snarling that goes with the concoction of mischief was never heard while that old clipper piled up the foam at her figurehead and trod down the seas like a steamboat.

The mates stood their round of watches, and since taking in sail was forbidden, and pumping occupied the men's time to the exclusion of other seamanlike work, there was little for them to do except closely to watch the steering, keep the gear well sweated up, see that the water did not gain on the pumps, and keep mental tally on the repairs which would have to be made on the rigging as soon as the breeze slackened enough to modify the leak.

Orson watched his ship night and day, comparing her progress with those old records, snatching time to eat just so much as would keep him alive, sleeping scarcely that much, until he became a lean, bronzed, bright-eyed specter of eternal vigilance, haunting every helmsman who shambled aft to take the wheel.

The Greek's broken arm slowed up in the mending, which was little to be wondered at. The man's swarthy skin turned color until it was a muddy yellow. He watched Orson with smoldering eyes; smoldering with the revived fires of hatred from that last tremendous voyage, and the added fuel of agonizing injury in the present. Orson noticed the change. He had reasons for wishing that Greek to recover quickly quite apart from considerations of work. He had a little matter of attempted knifing to adjust.

He took the suffering Greek below, broke the arm again and reset it after drenching it with powerful antiseptic to combat the breaking-out already evident, and sent the man forward with a stiff shot of rum in his belly. Then he had to laughingly reassure Nancy, who stood in the door of her cabin wide-eyed with horror at the cold-blooded operation. The giving of rum partly assured her that her wonderful man might not be all brute to his men. But it required five minutes of his own cunning diplomacy to drive the horror entirely from her eyes.

"He is the devil's father!" the Greek told the forecastle through gritted teeth.

And the breeze fell, the log no longer whirred. Orson paced the poop nervously, grinning unpleasantly. The ship took less water, until soon she needed pumping but once a day. Then the rigging work was started. Men found time to talk. Complaints rumbled through the ship.

CHAPTER XI

NANCY DOUBTS HER STATUS

As the days passed by, and the *Kestrel* made her tardy way south, Orson assumed a very different character to the one Nancy had grown reconciled to. Between hours of faultfinding and bouts of sarcastic comment that drove the mates to the verge of imbecility and made good helmsmen steer very badly, he sat at his chart table with the record book before him, going over his figures time after time in the futile attempt to assure himself that the *Kestrel* was not really falling behind the schedule she must maintain in order to achieve another record in her old age. No figuring would do that. Once since stealing out of 'Frisco Bay in the foggy night she had been many hours ahead of that schedule; now she lagged a half day behind. And the wind that she needed to drive her throbbing south'ard hung coy below the horizon.

In all her appointments the old clipper showed the results of economy and advancing age. There were gipsy-winches on the topgallant rail on each side, in the wake of the main rigging; these were used in need to help man power in taking home the main sheet when the winds were overlusty. Halyards whose lower blocks should have been fastened on

deck, were eked out by lengths of wire or chain. The royal and skysail halyards' lower blocks were made fast high up at the topmast heads. Bulwark panels which once were polished, showing the beauty of the wood, now showed up poorly under flaky paint. Teak buckets in an ornate rack beneath the poop rail, which was also of finest teak, were heavy with many a coat of brown, and their brass bands were crudely covered with aluminum paint. The booby-hatch companion was mahogany. It hid its glories under paint.

One afternoon when the noon sights had placed the ship far behind any record, Orson aroused the mate from his afternoon nap.

"Mister Martin," he said acridly, "the ship's like a Noah's Ark. She will neither sail nor drift. She looks like hell. The men grow fat and God damned lazy. And you sleep in the daytime. Get out o' your bed, Mister, and earn yer salt. The men will have no afternoon watch below until the ship is in good order. Scrape off the paint from rails and stanchions. Polish 'em. The poop buckets, too; and the booby-hatch companion. The rigging looks as if I had a crew of Mexicans. Renew the service, Mister, and you'll find tar in the stores. And when you go on deck, send that Greek down to me. I think he's sojering."

"That man's sick, sir. He's not faking," the mate ventured, ill pleased at having his nap broken in such a manner.

"Any man's faking who carries a broken arm a month in my ship!" Orson snarled.

To other duties now was added the dreary dry scraping of paint from old wood. The men hauled braces to every air that blew; and went back to their scraping immediately. Orson sat on the poop, his books in his lap, and no man dared presume—that those keen eyes were necessarily riveted upon print. The Greek held buckets between his knees and scraped with one hand, grinning as a human being was never meant to grin in this world. Godwin and Norris did their work as seamen should, and found much amusement in watching others. There was Groves, lazily scratching paint, staring boldly aft, talking all the while with Tredway, the sea lawyer. Between those two there was work done that would have shamed a green lad. But Norris had seen, and told his chum of it, that Orson was by no means so intent upon his books that he was not noticing the ex-reverend rascal and the forecastle attorney as they presumably worked.

But even in the splendidly fine weather, under blue skies that were like a benediction, in sunshine which soaked through to men's bones and warmed their blood, sailors' rest was an empty word. Breaking in upon the harsh scraping of dull steel on flinty paint:—

"Check in the royal and skysail yards, and brace up all the lower yards a trifle!" Orson would roar, leaping to his feet on a sudden impulse. Scrapers

would clang to the deck. Whatever officer was on watch would swear under his breath and drive the men grumbling from rope to rope. Gear would be coiled, and men would pick up their tools again, the oldest hands to steal a minute and maybe a puff at the pipe by visiting the grindstone. The watch officer would make a close inspection of the work done, and again take up his place on the poop, when—

"Take the handy-billy to the halyards all around, Mister. The sails hang like dirty shirts on a bush!" the skipper would rasp out. There would be more sullen tramping from rope to rope; more back breaking dragging on gear already bar taut; more scraping, and grumbling, and cursing.

And lately, although the weather was so fine as to almost drive Orson frantic, and the sun was mellow and the air like wine, Nancy was not often on deck. When she did appear, she usually carried some bit of feminine sewing work, which however she did not work at while Orson sat there. Mostly she stayed in the cabin during the daytime, coming up for an hour before supper after having made up some sort of dainty for the table out of the poor stores at her disposal. When she did appear, her eyes followed Orson fixedly. They were soft, and glowing, those eyes; and there was unexpected depth in them. Lately there was also a light in the depths which intensified as she watched her man.

Her man gave her mighty little attention those

days. He had no word for her, scarcely a look, while on deck. As the days mounted up, and he grew leaner and grimmer in proportion to the dropping behind schedule of his ship, he spoke to her, if at all, with no more gentleness or respect than he used toward mates or men. Yet always on going below to supper, he would caress her with some rough gesture. It hurt her more often than not; but she replied to the pain with a softly submissive smile. Nancy was secretly proud of his stern aspect. It made those infrequent little notices priceless.

One evening after a viciously laborsome day, Groves passed Nancy on his way to take the wheel, and Orson was not in sight. There had been many a clash in the forecastle between sour-tempered men since the monotonous round of pumping had given place to more wearisome scraping and pulley-hauling. Some of the fellows who had been beaten up that first night out, began to cast slurs at the more fortunate ones who had escaped the experience of Orson's methods. The Greek alone kept a somber and portentous silence when reprisals were talked about. He had sailed in the ship on that last record-breaking passage; the skipper was quite plainly down upon him; and he said nothing. All of which was very sufficient reason for his shipmates respecting his moods and expecting to see him force action of grim sort when he was ready. But Groves, ever remembering the terrific slapping he had received after the marriage ceremony, and unwilling to invite

a repetition of it, fumed to think that his pains were still unpaid for; and the train of thought turned his attention to those two young sailormen who had boasted that they joined the *Kestrel* just to test the toughness of her hardcase skipper.

"Tough?" Norris laughed in derision when Groves taunted him about it. "Tough? He's never been tough to me. Has he to you, Godwin? If he'd only manhandle us like he handled you guys we might try our luck. When he does, we will. Why don't you go and pull his nose, parson? You seem full of fight. I saw one o' your sort before, in a pulpit. Full o' girding on armor and fightin' good fights, he was, as long as he was snug in his talkin' box. A bloke who had been turned away from the church door 'cos he was a bit scammered pulled his nose and stole his hat afterwards, and the holy warrior never let out a peep. Why'n't you whisper in the gal's ear what you're always gassin' to us, if you want to start something? Let him start on us, and we'll try how tough he is. We're not fightin' your battles, though."

What the parson had been "gassin'" about was the mock ceremony he had been called to perform. The ship's company had been told about that. Some believed it; others, as simple as Nancy, believed that once a parson always a parson would rule, and the marriage would stand. Not that it made any difference. Mr. Martin and the Greek alone of the company had known Orson by more than repute

before this voyage; and they knew how little any man's opinion mattered to Val Orson where his women were concerned. They knew also, which was much more to the point, however, how like putting a match to gunpowder was meddling of any kind in his affairs; how like detonator to dynamite any interference with his female playthings.

Groves had no bowels for such interference. He could still feel those tremendous slaps on the face which, delivered flat-handed and apparently without heat, loosened his teeth and gave him a two days' nosebleed through mere concussion. It had been all over a glass of grog, too. If the steward had been a good fellow he would have given up that extra shot without fuss, and the skipper need never have heard about it. But now the steward was always at the skirts of the woman. She seemed to rule over the culinary department of the ship. There was never a chance for a sailorman to cadge a bit of cabin tucker any more. Sight of Nancy sitting there all alone, placidly working upon some trifling bit of silken stuff, peaceful and contented as any dairy cow in a meadow, prodded the ex-reverend, ex-jailbird able seaman to try how profound that placidity might be.

"Any time you get tired of this bully who's neglecting you, Nancy, let me know," Groves said with a sidelong glance at Mr. Ringlin. "We'll take good care of you forward."

The girl was startled out of her customary tran-

quillity. She stared at the man, and her lips parted in a queer astonishment. He winked at her, as she recalled he had done before, just after wedding her to Orson. That stung her to wifely protest.

"You'd better not let my husband hear anything like that!"

The man laughed softly, and as he slithered along to the wheel flung over his shoulder at her the one word:

"Husband?"

Something in the tone that word was uttered in caused the girl to stare long after Groves had taken the helm. He only raised his eyes once afterwards, and she caught the glitter in them as they met hers. She turned pale, and her lower lip trembled. Gathering up her work, she ran below, and entered the skipper's stateroom without warning. Val Orson lay sprawled out on the settee, a trinket box on his chest, and his hands were full of pictures which seemed to be giving him a good deal of amusement. He glanced up as Nancy entered, gave her a half contemptuous smile, and applied himself again to his pictures. Nancy saw at once what they were. Girls. Every one a photograph. They were his gallery of conquest; his chamber of horrors; his garden of memories; according to his mood. Nancy had seen those photos before, in overhauling the drawers and lockers for body and bed linen. She had given them about as much attention then as she gave to his old boots and oil-

skins. Little as had been her experience with men, she knew the reputation sailors had, and in her innocence was rather flattered to know that the man who had carried her off, her man whom she had won in wedlock, was no leftover from the game: that he had chosen her out of all those amazing beauties he had known, God knew how well. But even her docility was scarcely proof against this evidence that those beauties still held place in his interest.

She stood beside him, and her hand sought his. Again he flashed a glance up at her, and saw that her lips still trembled, but that her eyes were dark with resentment. Gently she took the picture he was holding.

"You are my husband, aren't you, Val?" she asked, a little brokenly. "There isn't any doubt of it, is there?"

A greenish light glittered in Orson's eyes. He sat up, gripping her around the waist. Gently she moved his hand, as if she feared its pressure. He drew her toward him, and the pictures fell to the floor.

"Tell me who has been putting that into your head?"

"I want to know for myself, Val, because—"

"Never mind thinking up lies," he rasped, gripping her so tightly that she moaned. "Who's been talking to you?"

"One of the men said 'husband' in my hearing,

and he said it as if he was sneering at me, Val. I didn't see who it was."

Orson laughed unpleasantly. He pulled her down beside him on the settee.

"That man's voice will get him into trouble, Nancy. And your ears are too sharp. You are my wife, aren't you?"

"I—I hope so, Val—" she stammered in a rush and he regarded her queerly— "because I'm shamed forever if I'm not."

She tumbled down upon him, hiding her face at his breast. Val Orson, grinning over her head, patted her shoulder and soothed her with words that in no way matched his expression, which was one of amusement.

"Well, well! So little wifie is not sure of me, eh? Damned if you ain't a proper wife, Nancy. And you can just bet your silk socks I'm your husband. I'll talk to that parson by and by."

"Oh, it wasn't him!" cried Nancy, terrified for the man now that she had been assured that she was a proper wife.

"Don't bother to shield him, Nancy," Orson laughed, squeezing her to him. "I know the rat. Forget him a while. Look at this little baggage here. She jumped overboard when she found she was going to have a baby," and he picked up a photo of a little olive-tinted Eurasian with a frangipani blossom between her laughing lips. "Don't you ever try things like that. Here's another little—." He

selected the photograph of the Malay girl. "Knifed me, that one did. Don't try that, either!"

"I wouldn't want to do either of those things, unless you deceived me, Val," Nancy replied soberly. The scattered pictures fell from Orson as he got up from the settee, and she began to gather them up. He watched her narrowly; and when she looked the least bit hurt at the number and variety of the collection, he interjected bits of spicy description about the subjects, and smiled cruelly as the stabs went home.

But Nancy was singing softly to herself when, her man having gone on deck, she again sat alone in the stateroom sewing on small pieces of Eastern silks. The pictures she had put away. They were only pictures.

As for her man, he had gone on deck with certain things in mind concerning a supposedly malingering Greek sailor and a presumptuous ex-parson; and those things were displaced in his mind by the serious attitude of Nancy. It was not the reminder of his benedict state that arrested him. Nor the manner of the girl's acceptance of the situation. It was that she believed she was his lawful spouse, and seemed proud of it. He had almost forgotten that ceremony.

A puzzled Greek sneaked forward unharmed after waiting an hour to see the master at the mate's order. A suspicious ex-clergyman helmsman warily dodged forward at the expiration of his trick, keep-

ing an anxious eye upon the chuckling skipper and drawing no penalty for what he had stirred up.

"He's looney!" he told the crowd in the forecastle. "That wench has softened him up. Now's a good time to try out your ideas on him, Norris."

CHAPTER XII

DRY ROT

Crossing a belt of squally weather the cargo worked loose in the hold. Only Orson's mad sail carrying could have made that possible, for lumber well stowed is hard to shift. Some great baulks of timber were squeezed up and out of the mass, so that when a fierce squall passed, after heaving the *Kestrel* down so that the sheerpoles dipped, with never a royal started, the ship did not come upright when the wind left her sails empty.

"Take the royals in, sir?" Mr. Ringlin asked, with an anxious eye upon another line of squalls up wind.

"Let everything stand!" Orson retorted. He too watched the weather sky. "Call all hands. Tell Mr. Martin to come to me in the main hold with his gang, and to bring hooks. Watch the ship. I want squalls to help her, not hinder her."

Orson sat on the hatch coaming, his feet dangling, so that he could at once direct the men below and be sure that no sail was taken in above. Ringlin clutched the poop rail, his youthful face not so brightly cocksure as when he joined the ship. He was beginning to believe that all the wild yarns told about Val Orson might not be imagination. A

creaming line of sea ran toward the ship under a sky so clearly blue as to make any idea of danger seem foolish. Orson smelled it. That was the sort of squall that carried weight quite often. Soon he heard the moan of it. The *Kestrel's* sails filled and emptied in the first forerunning puff.

"Hold on below," he called to the men among the logs. Then all his attention was for the actions of the second mate. The Greek was at the helm. Always when a man was required somewhere else with two sound arms, the Greek was at the helm. The squall struck. The ship began to roll down, with a roar of sea at the bow and a roar of wind in the tall fabric of spars and canvas. Ringlin motioned to the Greek, whose teeth gleamed in a frightened grin, and the *Kestrel* was slowly luffed into the wind until her weather leeches quivered. Then she began to gather speed, and slowly lessened her perilous angle of heel.

"Carry on below," Orson barked, and growling men scrambled up from leeward in the hold, bruised and partly skinned by the down flinging.

With dogs and tackles, hooks and bars they fought with the heavy square logs, while the *Kestrel* leaped like a crazy thing through the hissing seas, her lee waterways foaming, her bows a smother of mist.

Orson glowered under the edge of the hatch. His ears told him all he needed to know concerning the performance of the ship herself. With Mr. Martin

below, he knew that his actual orders would be carried out, if men could do the work. And work it was. Men slipped across the timbers, carried down to leeward with the logs in the lee lurches. They cursed that grim, silent figure sitting up there with dangling feet. But they toiled. Oh yes. They toiled because every man knew down in his heart that the grim silent man with dangling feet was man enough to do the work of any two of them.

Three men wrestled with one end of a great square log, at a disadvantage because of the low beams above them. The ship reeled, and there was an instant when men and logs semed fated to go hurtling down to the lee side again, when the place for the log yawned a scant foot further up. The three men sprawled before an impatient thrust. Val Orson leaped among them, lifted the log end, and dropped it into place without apparent effort.

"Carry on," he ordered, and resumed his place in the hatchway.

Men swore in lower tones. The mate led them in a subdued sort of fashion. He expected Orson to storm and rave about the uselessness of modern mates and men. Instead, the skipper resumed his seat without a single comment. It wasn't right. It wasn't natural.

But Orson had seen something. The *Kestrel* was old. She had been well built. But during her passage through the years she had been owned by men who cared nothing for sentiment. In her best day

some of her beams had been made in sections. That was a trick copied from the old slavers, and it spelled speed; no doubt of that. A stiff, rigid ship could never sail as fast as a ship that worked a bit under stress. So the slavers, to whom speed was everything, developed the idea, perhaps by accident of gunshot, of sawing the beams in two or three pieces, removing the middle piece whenever pressed for speed. And the idea was carried forward into legitimate pursuits. The *Kestrel's* builders had it. They built her with beams in three parts. Her early speed bore them out. But the folks from whom Orson rebought her, ignorant of all save earning power of a ship, replaced the cut beams with whole beams of very inferior wood. And now Val Orson was looking at the crumbling of the dry rot before his eyes. Pressed as the *Kestrel* was, her beams worked and moved against the fastenings, bits of rotten wood dropping with every strain of the ship.

Orson's face was grimly humorous. That dry rot was quite in tune with all the rest of the ship. He knew there were timbers that scarcely held the bolts. There were stanchions holding the bulwarks presumably, whereas actually the bulwarks held the rotted stanchions. The doublings of the masts had rotten spots. Every time the rigging was set up the fids crushed through the wood sides of the fid holes. And when pumps were manned, as often they were, bits of brown wood sometimes floated up

on the spouting streams. Chips, working with the rest in the hold, looked up when a shower of wood fragments fell upon him from the beams, caught Orson's eye, and came up beside him.

"I didn't call you," Orson snapped.

"Thought maybe you was thinkin' of strengthenin' them beams, sir," Chips mumbled. "Purty bad, they be, cap'n, purty bad."

"When you get through down below, you can saw away the 'midship third of all the rotten beams," Orson returned with a grin. "She'll sail better the more she works."

Chips went back to his stowing of the logs and told the mate the Old Man was madder than ever. Orson went aft, and took out his record passage book.

The *Kestrel* was behind her schedule. Her heavy freight of great timbers did not work down into trim as quickly as other cargoes. And while the squalls drove her forward tremendously, she was being overdriven. Yet Orson kept her to the work. He had seen no other ships since leaving port; there was no way of comparing the *Kestrel's* speed with that of another vessel in the same weather conditions. All he knew was that his ancient clipper, with all his driving, lagged nearly a full day behind the best record to her present position on the chart.

Impatient for the mate to bring his men out of the hold, to know the stowage was secure again, he pored over his figures with moody eyes. His

mania was not speed; not driving a ship beyond her limit; but adding glory to his cherished old *Kestrel* in her declining years, when other men had called her a has-been.

Tracing with his finger the thin line of her track down the chart of the Pacific, Orson referred from time to time to the passage book of Maury. He had sailed the best course, so far as was humanly possible. And the last position was circled much farther to the southward than any other ship save one had ever reached in an equal number of days. But that one other, that maker of records, was like a sand mote in his eye as he glowered down at the chart. He had, early in the voyage, brought the latest picture of the ship up to the chartroom from his cabin, and it hung there before him as he stood at the table.

The bulkhead on which it hung was part of the *Kestrel's* original structure. Of polished teak, finely fitted, carved at all corner supports, darkened and beautified with age, the wall seemed a fit shrine for the picture. Up high, where some damage of bygone days had been repaired with common stuff, the painted wood creeped and worked like the beams in the hold. But painted trash and creeping decay could not eradicate from Val Orson's mental vision the glorious picture conjured up by the framed presentment hanging before his face.

Grand, upstanding forest trees. Waving fields of hemp. Grim scars in rugged hillsides yielding

iron to men as grim. Flashing adze, and whirring saw. Blazing furnace, and clanging hammers. These, and the buzzing industry of swarming men, Val Orson saw in the vision of his old clipper's birth. Then he saw the long, sleepy ropewalk, with sitting boys turning spinning wheels; ropemakers walking backward down the sunny shedded aisles, bundles of dressed hemp in the aprons at their waists, spinning out the even threads which would afterward be laid up with top and tar into smooth, strong rope for the harnessing of the proud clipper. From the sunny ropewalk the picture changed abruptly to a grayer scene. Frowning walls, massive gates, uniformed guards. And men in convict garb picking oakum; drearily, day in, day out, week after week, and year after year, for a lifetime perhaps, hard-faced hopeless men tearing old tarred rope apart on spikes driven into planks; cruelly tortured fingers shredding the broken strands, picking the fiber back into its original form. All this to make his clipper's seams tight against the sea.

Orson laughed when he thought of those convicts, toiling to make oakum for him. They didn't know him either. Men worked for him even without ever knowing him. It was well they did. He who had a way of commanding men and women to his will. But there were other little high lights in his vision. There were the cunning hands that had wrought the *Kestrel's* carven rails, and saloon paneling; her cabin furniture, and the great skylight with gilded

kestrels taking flight from each corner, from whose wing tips was suspended the great swinging lamp in chains, itself a marvel of beaten brass and engraved silver.

But most of all, peering through the vision before his eyes, was the circled dot on the track chart which told him that his flying *Kestrel* lagged behind the record he had sworn to beat. He put away his book of passages, examined the barometer—not with fear for a bad weather portent, but with misgivings that the promise might not include wind, and stepped out on deck. Mr. Ringlin was about to enter the chartroom in search of him. Mr. Martin and the carpenter were putting the hatches back over the hold.

"Sail over the weather quarter, sir," Ringlin reported with a brief gesture. Orson started. No ship had been overtaken that day. Mr. Martin ascended the poop ladder while the captain scanned the distant sail through glasses. The eyes of everybody near were upon Val Orson as he swayed there on spread feet; and they all could witness the hardened jaw muscles working, the veins throbbing in the powerful neck, the tense hands gripping the binoculars.

"Easy to see what she is. That's the old *Huntress,*" quoth Martin. "Seems to be overhauling us, don't she, sir?"

"That—old—wagon?" stuttered Orson, turning

to glare at the mate. "She can't sail that fast! It's another, newer—"

"I know the *Huntress,*" Martin insisted. "I ought to." He met the skipper's eye, and Orson grinned in spite of his chagrin. Over there where the old *Huntress* swam serenely along, a breeze blew which the *Kestrel* was missing. Wherever the *Huntress* had sailed, she must have held stronger, steadier winds than the *Kestrel* in order to be where she was. And she still glided ahead. Since her sail was first seen against the black of a squall, she had crept up measurably upon the bigger, faster ship.

"Take a gang and pump her dry," snapped Orson. His eyes glittered fiercely. "You, Mister," to Ringlin, "take watch tackles and sweat up everything all round. Watch yourself, there at the helm, or I'll give you a lesson. One o' you tell the steward I'll take my meals up here until that sail's lost astern. Jump, you!"

Men trooped around the decks from halyard to brace, and from brace to sheet, growling, cursing, never daring a song. And as evening drew on, the squalls ceased, the wind settled steady, hardened into a stiff half gale with a hint of chill in it. Val Orson watched near the wheel. He ate sitting on the steering grating. Sometimes he seemed to doze, sitting there. But helmsman after helmsman could swear that he never really slept. And that was the beginning of bitter times for the *Kestrel's* brood.

PART III

CHAPTER XIII

MAN POWER

MEN had called Val Orson a devil. Perhaps he was. He certainly possessed many devilish attributes. Twenty-four hours after the old *Huntress* had been seen, Orson still kept the deck as alert, as vital as on that foggy night when he fooled the police. If he slept he did it as a cat might sleep in a dog kennel—one eye at a time. Through a night of growing wind, with many a keen drift of sleet, he paced back and forth on the poop, drinking mighty mugs of scalding coffee, black and strong enough to float a marlinespike; and when the steward could no longer remain awake Nancy Prouse took up the making and serving of the pungent liquor.

All that night, though she dutifully served her lord, adding sometimes a little offering of cake or biscuit out of sheer human good-heartedness, Nancy never received from him a word or a glance of thanks or plain notice. Still she trotted up and down the stairs, bearing mugs full or empty, humming a little song, all bravely fighting off sleep because her man, her husband, kept the deck and would not rest. Nancy no longer regarded Val Orson as anything but a masterful, powerful, superior being who had chosen her for his mate and had clinched the

mating with marriage. Holding that idea, with her primitive training behind her, Nancy thoroughly believed with all her heart that her duty lay in his service. Her religious training, forced into her and accepted by her in unformed childhood, had taught her many things she did not understand in the least; but so deep rooted were those things, and so mysterious were the reward and punishments connected with those things, that she, like millions of others, continued to accept those teachings as representing facts even when a woman grown. And one of the things she had been taught was, that a woman must cleave to her husband through good and evil though the heavens fall.

And when the snow came, and on the gale it grew to a bitter blizzard, she still tenderly cared for his wants, though her clothing equipment was of the scantiest for such weather. Val Orson stood six feet in his sea-boots. Nancy was something less than than five-feet-one in her borrowed silken Chinese slippers. Val Orson's oilskins fitted her like a tent; his sweater reached to her knees and the sleeves covered her hands. His sou'wester extinguished her head until she had to cant her chin almost to neck-breaking point to see him when giving him coffee. That amused him. He would take the cup, and scoop the cakes or bread from the saucer, with a grin that seemed to eradicate the utter fatigue that dulled his senses. He would crush the sou'wester farther over her eyes, grip her over-

sleeved arm, and send her below all shaking with pain and apprehension; yet Nancy always thrilled to the marrow under his brutal kindness.

She was not of the keen mentality to get the fullest thrill, perhaps, but while dabbing tinned butter on the bruises he had made she dumbly worshipped her masterful man. That was about the limit of Nancy Prouse's understanding. Yet in her dreamy moments, when lying in bed waiting for a possible sound which might tell her that he was coming down to sleep properly in his proper bed, all too rare an occurrence lately, she had a vision of a son she might give him; and that son would be sturdy and healthy, clean and honest like her, and strong and virile, masterful and wonderful like him. Of course the babe might be a girl. It might be simple like her and wicked like him. But Nancy Prouse believed in the God of her youth, and believed with all her soul that the child she hoped to bear would be a paragon of all the combined beauty and power and brain of his parents. Once, during the earlier days of the hardening weather, she felt seasick. She courageously fought and conquered the feeling, with the heroic means suggested humorously by Orson, simply because she refused to irritate him by succumbing to an unsailorly weakness.

Forward were many opinions of Val Orson, and some were pungent. Only one man seemed to withhold a spoken opinion, and that was the Greek, whose twice broken arm mended slowly in the icy

temperature the *Kestrel* sailed in. But when the skipper was named in the forecastle, no man cared to look twice into the Greek's eyes. The others loudly told of what they meant to do, would do, could do to Val Orson if certain conditions came about. The sea-lawyer, Tredway, and the ex-parson, Groves, specialized in wordy harangues. Norris and Godwin, who had joined the ship in challenge of the bloodbuckoism of Orson, alone seemed to thrive of all the forecastle gang. And they gave little satisfaction and many irksome moments to the late Reverend Peter Groves and the always irreverent sea-lawyer, Tredway.

"If I wuz a fightin' bloke, I'd show yer," quoth Tredway, his eyes downcast at the mess-kid. The forecastle was wet and chill. There was the bogy stove; but Orson, to supply men enough to sail his ship, had not only cut stores to the last ounce, but had totally ignored fuel for the bogy stove. Two days of fierce driving, through a wild quartering gale in sleet which grew to plain snow, froze the forecastle and rendered its inmates less than human. And the mess-kids contained dreary rations, pound by law; the kettles, pint by the same unholy ruling, of the least solid and liquid on which human life might be sustained. Long since had the leak in the eyes of the ship increased to an alarming volume whenever the ship took a deep plunge, and that was frequently now.

"If I wuz a fightin' bloke—" quoth Tredway.

"What 'ud you do?" grinned Norris, knowing full well at whom that gibe was aimed. His grin riled the Reverend Groves. It always riled him. It infuriated Tredway, the sea-lawyer.

"I'd do somefink, bli'me, and not sit larfin' at blokes as don't brag about joinin' a ship to try how tough a bloke is!"

Norris laughed. Godwin had lost the habit of laughing lately. The ship's little world had so changed.

"If you squealers had half the guts of Orson, this ship wouldn't be a hellship, she'd be a crack packet," said Norris. "I joined her, so did Godwin, to try how tough this Val Orson is. I know, and Godwin knows, and it didn't take us long to find out. He hasn't scraped us down, has he? You don't see any black eyes or busted arms on us, do you—?"

"No, Lord stiffen me! Becos you ain't got the guts of a louse to face him!" squealed Tredway, in frenzy.

"We'll face him ready enough if he ever rides us. Orson rides only mules, though, so far as we can see. You're all chafed with saddle sores."

Norris turned with a shrug. Godwin wanted to stay with him, and meant to, but many things had occurred since sailing from San Francisco Bay which made him wonder whether he had been sane when signing on in the *Kestrel.* Godwin was the quieter of the pair. He spent a lot of his lifetime looking

for excitement. In many ships he had found it; but never to the extent that he had found possibilities for it in the *Kestrel.* But still, he could agree with Norris regarding Orson. Never yet had he, or Norris, met with a man having such a name who could wear it as well as Val Orson wore his.

"Do not anger these brave boys. They will strike when the *Kestrel's* head droops," said the Greek, in silky, derisive accents.

"I'll strike now!" snapped Godwin, turning upon the Greek. Groves smiled. He nudged Tredway. Together they placed hands upon Godwin and the Greek. It was not necessary, but to assume that it was, and to make an issue, was certain, in the state of mind of the forecastle, to force the seamen of that watch to take sides. Sooner or later there would have to be a climax, and some would be on one side of it, some on the other.

"Brothers, I beg you to be slow to anger," chanted Peter Groves, hands uplifted, eyes rolling. "Soon our young valiants will lead to battle, and Captain Orson will bite the bloody dust. Is it not so, brother Godwin?"

"I'll bite you in the bloody nose," growled Godwin, rolling into his bunk.

Groves laughed. Others laughed. Only the Greek maintained an expressionless countenance. The watch lacked many hours of its rightful due of sleep. Tredway, the virulent, spunkless sea-lawyer, wanted sleep more than anything else—any-

thing else, that is, than reprisal. If Tredway wanted anything in this world, more than a full belly, it was revenge. He came from that part of London near the Tower, where socialists and Russian propagandists have their free fling under the banner of utterly free and sometimes rather foolish old England; and one of the memories he nursed in his wizened little chest was that he had shaken hands with Kropotkin at a mob meeting on Tower Hill.

Tredway was ready, at any time, to carry a rear banner, to follow a leader, to shout in chorus, to stab in the back, to lay off a good safe distance and howl bloody murder and sudden death to anybody holding higher place than he.

Groves had shown Tredway a way to raise the whole standard of living for the workers of the world. That the precious pair had no notion of work made no difference. Val Orson represented to them the bloated capitalist; the ogre. Legitimate game for all good rebels. Unfortunately, Orson had a faculty for making people work.

"Can't we git 'old o' that bloody floosey of his?" Tredway wanted to know. All the watch was asleep, except Tredway and Groves.

Groves had vivid memories of trying to get hold of Orson's woman. His grinding teeth still pained him when he ate anything more solid than hash. Tredway was a fixed satellite, if a satellite can be fixed; that is to say, Tredway revolved, not without throwing off a few sparks, entirely and contentedly,

in the orbit of Peter Groves. But Tredway was by way at times of making himself a nuisance. Groves wanted to start something. Oh, very surely! But not until the denouement could be fairly seen, so far as the late Reverend Peter Groves was concerned.

"Tredway, you must govern your evil passions," Groves said, with tremendous unction. "Mrs. Orson is not to be—"

"Missus Orson! Bli'me!" cackled Tredway. "Why, you told us yerself she wusn't no bleedin' missus. She'll help us to skoff him as soon as she knows— Say, matey, 'ow about gyppin' the Greek into startin' somethink? He's had long enough to let 'is arm get well."

"I counsel patience. I have a plan by which I shall be invited aft quite often. Then—"

"Yus, then you'll be a hell of a lot o' good to anybody! And while yer about it, I and all of us is workin' our guts out at pumps, and watch-taykles, and pulley-haul." The vicious little sea-lawyer jumped up, waving his hands. "Gawd stiffen me! Are we to carry on luggin' our soul cases apart all the way round Cape Stiff? Wot's the good o' that? Strike while the iron's 'ot, that's my motter."

Norris half raised himself, picked up a sea-boot from beside his bunk, and swung it. The heel took Tredway behind the ear, and the argument was finished at least for that watch.

CHAPTER XIV

SEA FEVER

MR. MARTIN walked the poop from wheel grating to ladder head and back, stepping briskly and without much regard for his weight above the cabins. Lest that seem incredible in such a ship as the *Kestrel,* with such a master as Val Orson, and particularly with such a dutiful mate as Martin, it might as well be mentioned here that cold weather had swiftly settled upon the ship: bitter, bone-cracking weather. Even that was not sufficient reason for any good sailorman of the deepwater to tramp over the head of possible sleeping shipmates; reason number two, then, was that Val Orson at last had been forced to sleep in earnest. In the chartroom he lay, dead to the world, his strong soul lost in weariness; his powerful body at the mercy of whomever dared. But Nancy sat on the settee, all curled up—twisted would better describe her excruciating posture—shivering with the biting cold that whistled through the door cracks; and in her lap lay Orson's head, the wiry hair all wild about his face. Her hand, which had ventured to loosen his oilskin coat at the neck, was gripped in one of his with power far beyond any effort of hers to move. And to exonerate entirely Mr. Martin from any unsailorly

charge, it may be said that the *Kestrel* had the wind over the port quarter. So, in tramping up and down, keeping his blood moving, the mate only walked over empty cabins, since his own room was on that side, and the second mate could not hear him across the breadth of the poop; the master's room was empty, and the steward had no right to want to sleep anyhow, at that time o' day.

One or twice Martin glanced into the chartroom. Once he entered, and before Nancy's eyes could well light with reproof, he had whipped the carpet from its fastening pins and whirled it about her shivering shoulders, folding what was left over Orson's long form. Nancy stared at first, as if doubting the motive for the act. Then when Martin went out without a word, she smiled after him, and he caught the smile through the foggy port glass.

Martin had no great love for his captain, and very little respect for him as a man. But as a seaman Val Orson stood very high with Martin, as he must stand with any real seaman of the deep-water. Moreover, Martin knew well enough that Val Orson alive was better than two Val Orsons dead, and the way Orson had been living lately spelled death if he did not let up. As for the woman in the case, that was none of Martin's business, until the woman appealed to him for help; and Nancy Prouse looked as if she needed no help from anybody. If ever a woman had come aboard the *Kestrel,* and become reconciled to her handling

at Val Orson's hands, it was Nancy. Martin very wisely let well enough alone.

The ship's way was a different matter. No matter what part Orson had in the performance of the *Kestrel,* there was the stupendous fact that she was once again a full day ahead of every sailing record ever put up since the first man made the first floating thing depending upon the winds for its volition. Reflected glory from that last staggering passage had warmed Mr. Martin so thoroughly that he glowed even now at thought of it. But this present passage bade fair to eclipse that other, if only the gang forward could be kept to their work. And they would be. Orson was a driver, a man-killer, but he spared himself no more than he did others, and neither did he spare his ship. Never in all his seafaring had Martin seen a ship so pressed with sail when winds blew hard. Even now, as he walked the poop with tingling ears, toes, and fingers, that fore-topgallant sheet looked as if a half-mile more in the wind's velocity must crack it in the sheave and flog the sail to rags.

But as the exercise warmed him, the mate saw no peril in that fact. He saw only the tremendous differences that sail made in the ship's speed. And he would have been the very last man in the ship to advise taking that sail in until the sheet actually snapped.

In brief, Mr. Martin was in love with the ship.

Prosaic though his sea life had become, a mat-

ter of hard necessity and the only thing he knew, mature Martin still had sea fever. Or rather, after long years of commonplace voyaging in commonplace ships with commonplace masters, the sea fever of his youth had recurred with the *Kestrel* and Val Orson. Young Ringlin drove the men in his watch because Orson demanded it, and he had decided that Orson was no man to cross. Martin drove his men in the port watch because he could see that the ship demanded it, and he had decided that the ship was to be sailed to another record if man power and the winds held true.

Now he watched that straining topgallant sheet through flurries of sleet and snow, humming a tuneless chantey between his teeth. The men on his watch stood by in the lee of the forward house, cursing the ship and all within her now that the bitter weather searched out the inadequacies of their outfits. They had cursed the skipper almost entirely before. Only now and then, when work was afoot, did they use the sailor's prerogative to curse the ship. But the cold got to their bones. They cursed all and sundry; even each other.

"Try the pumps, m'lads!" shouted Martin at midnight. The bell was struck four times; the wheel relief shambled aft, grinning as he took the trick, while the man he relieved swore terrifically at the prospect of going to the pump wheel immediately he let go of the steering wheel.

Sullenly the men ground the pumps around, the

men at the hauling lanyards pulling without any regard to the position of the handles. A dreary dribble of water emerged from the lips, and Chips knew there was more water than that.

"Coom on, boys, rattle her clear," Chips sang out hopefully. "Let's give her a song. Now then:

"Fire in the lifeboat, fire in the gig,
Fire in the longboat roasting the pig!
Fire! Fire! Fire down below!
Keep the pumps a-goin', lads,
There's fire down below."

Chips sang alone. The man nearest to him, a quiet, hot-eyed man who seemed of all the gang most outwardly docile, shoved him with a savage elbow and spat:

"To hell wit' yer bloody shantys! Wish there wuz a fire that 'ud burn the ship and roast that bloody swine aft! Let him ease the ship, then we won't sweat our guts out pumpin'."

"Ought to be glad o' work to warm ye," grumbled Chips. But nobody sided with him, and he pumped.

The stream gained volume, through the necessity of the water coming up to force out that above it. The gang did a sulky job of it, and Martin, watching the growing seas, the driving sleet, knew they were not clearing her. He would have put life into them by jumping down among them; but he

dared not leave the poop while that grim sleeping man lay so near. The wind increased too. Gusts that came along like icy breath shrieked, and when they passed they left something of themselves behind them to reinforce the gale. A long sea hissed above the rail, broke, and fell aboard with a crash. The men at the pumps left the handles and swarmed onto fiferails and stays. Two, not alert enough, were picked up on the roaring water and hurled along to smash against the spare topmast in the waterways. And the ship heeled down to the blast. The precarious topgallant sheet snapped with a gunshot sound; and the flogging sail shook the yard and mast until men who had clambered onto the fiferail leaped down into the welter of water in fright that the whole tall fabric would crash about their ears.

"Now he'll have to ease her, damn him!" a man screamed, spitting out brine and blood, for he had fallen head first upon the pump wheel, iron and merciless. The mate was already half-way down the poop ladder, bawling to men already crazed with resentment to let go halyards, man clewlines, sheets, and braces to get the flogging sail in; and out of the chartroom stepped Orson, alert and awake as if he had never been asleep, the carpet trailing behind him and Nancy toppling over on the reeling deck in her effort to disentangle him.

"Call all hands, Mister Martin," Orson sang out, his clear, cutting tone piercing the uproar of wind,

sea, and thundering canvas. The steward called the second mate. Martin ran forward, pounding on the forecastle doors, kicking at the bosun's door while standing pounding at the door of the starboard forecastle. Both doors lay adjacent, at right angles. The bosun came out, growling until he saw Martin. Men unfastened the forecastle door, scared into wakefulness, peering out as they scrambled into meager clothes. Water flowed over the forecastle floors, a grimy stream on which floated bits of straw, matches, broken shoes, scraps of hardtack, and all manner of débris from an untidy gang of discontented sailors who never really merited the name of seamen. Godwin and Norris were among the first out, and they alone of the watch were clothed in a fashion to brave the bitter cold outside.

The Greek grinned. He always grinned now. A death's head grins in much the same way. There was much to be said in excuse for the Greek grinning that way. He had been shanghaied without even the poor outfit the others got from the crimps. His twice broken arm, though healing, was a limb of devilish agony in the cold and damp. In every case of vicious weather hitherto, he it was who always stood double wheels while other men could work and warm themselves. And none knew like the Greek knew how mad a thing the old *Kestrel* could be, steering at the whim of a mad skipper, over-pressed with sail in the cruelest of wind and

sea. Tredway cringed past the mate, almost crying. Groves tried to put on bravado, but was a less heroic figure than Tredway as soon as he saw what awaited him outside.

"Up aloft and secure that sail!" the mate shouted. He had to shout to be heard. Ringlin was already down among the disorganized mob milling around the gear.

"One watch can get that sail secured and unbent," roared Orson. "Make the others pump her clear. Tell the mate I want him!"

Martin stumbled aft. Orson met him midway up the weather ladder.

"The ship's loggy with water! See those dogs rattle her free. And get that sail on deck and bend a new one. You'll stand Kalashie watches from now on until the weather moderates."

Mr. Martin stumbled down again, and into the weltering main deck. He joined Ringlin, driving men before him. Ringlin, good enough sailorman though young, left the deck to his superior as soon as he saw him, and sprang into the weather rigging with a yell of encouragement to the tardy men to follow him into the roaring heights aloft, where a very demon of broken wire and iron and canvas strove to tear the foretopgallant yard and mast from the fastenings and whip it out to the gray, spumy sea.

"One o' you stand by to 'tend the gear, the rest get back to pumping," Martin ordered.

For a wonder it was the Greek who got the job to tend the gear for the men aloft. He knew the ropes of the *Kestrel.* He had been there before. It was an easy job for him; much easier than any he had had before, and it made him grin. But he was always grinning lately. Nobody noticed any difference in him.

Martin himself, seeing Orson in command, led the brooding gang at the pumping. He started a chantey, the same as Chips had started, since it was a good old song for clearing a ship of water, as it was for manning pumps to put out a fire.

"Fire in the cabin, fire in the house,
Fire in the galley burning the scouse.
Fire! Fire! Fire down below!
Send her round, my hearties,
There's a fire down below!"

Martin sang alone, as Chips had done. Chips was aloft now, helping to secure the yard before the wild canvas wrecked it and gave him the job to make a new one when his carpenter's bench was unapproachable in the torrenting water that swirled about it.

"Come on, lads, sing up!" yelled Martin, raising his head to start another stave.

"Sing yerself and go to 'ell!" Tredway piped up, preposterously bold. The little forecastle lawyer

was on the verge of tears. His was the valor of frenzy.

Martin let go the pump brakes, raising a ready fist. Another cresting sea rose above the bulwarks, falling aboard with a roar. Orson, mindful of man shortage, as even a bucko without half his worth had to be in like case, yelled:

"Watch yourselves! Look out for your lives!"

Martin's fist fell, but to grip Tredway as the sea washed him from the pumps. The Reverend Groves, intent upon what seemed about to happen between Martin and the forecastle lawyer, found himself borne along on the crashing sea until he was lifted bodily and jammed between two steps of the lee poop ladder so that he could not stir, and perforce had to take the next surge of bitter water all over his gasping face.

"Haul up that weather buntline, on deck!" a thin voice pealed from aloft. It was hard to recognize in that voice the bull note of Ringlin. The wind was asserting itself above even the bull notes of human beings. The Greek grinned, half broken against the rail, and clawed his way to the belaying pin which held the buntline that had been imperfectly hauled home.

"Round with the pumps, my lads!" Martin bellowed, the water gone. "It's pump her or sink with her. And look at her go! Now, boys, she's a fine ship. Give her a chance!"

"Let 'er sink, perish 'er!" squealed Tredway,

spitting out salt water. He was no way abashed by his escape, nor by the circumstance that Martin had perhaps saved him from a bad accident. He gripped the pump wheel more as something to hold on by. He had to follow the motions of the rest.

And Ringlin. The beefy young second mate who joined with so much youthful ardor, and had so early decided that he was not the best man in the ship, worked up there in the howling chaos of damage like ten men, forcing men to toil by his example. Out of what seemed to be certain loss, he contrived to save all of the shredded canvas except two cloths. Chips saved the yard. The bosun caught the broken end of the wire sheet and jammed it fast before it whipped more gear to bits by its murderous flicking. And the men came panting down to the deck. They had earned their salt. That driving bully aft could do no less than let up now.

"Get another sheet fitted, and hurry with the new sail!" Orson snapped out. "Chips, try the well."

The well showed the water no more than held in check. The pumps had not lowered it.

"Now pump, blast you!" gritted Martin, unwilling to hear what Orson would say to him. "Pump, by gravy, or I'll work you up! Come on, now!"

Orson stood like a grim effigy of scorn on the poop while the new foretopgallant sail was bent. But Mr. Martin led the gang, and he was savage

enough to do no more saving of souls when seas boarded the ship, but his hand was ready and heavy on shirkers. Groves was found jammed in the ladder when the two mates went aft, the ship free of water and the sail set.

"I'm desperately hurt, sir," Groves whimpered.

"Haul him out!" growled Martin. Ringlin kicked and tugged the man free. And Martin looked him over.

"If you're hurt, go see the captain," he said.

"I'm not hurt that badly," Groves returned hurriedly, and scurried along to where his watchmates cowered in shelter.

The rest of the watch Martin stood in wonder that the ship could endure. Orson was in the chartroom again, but poring over the chart and his precious records. Just before eight bells, Martin, watching the passing of a screaming squall of snow that had hounded the *Kestrel* along for twelve miles in little more than half an hour, saw something which sent him to the chartroom door in a hurry.

"A ship right under the lee bow, sir!" he shouted. Orson stepped out, scarcely interested.

"Can't you decide what to do—?" he started to say; then, as near excitement as Martin ever saw him, he rubbed his eyes, snatched the glasses from the box banded to the chartroom rail, and peered through the flurrying snow.

"Hell and glory!" he muttered, scarcely above a whisper. "That the *Trimount!*"

"She sailed two weeks before us, sir!" Martin cried, incredulously.

"It's her, just the same. And she's making bad weather of it under lower topsails! Mister, send the bosun and a couple of good hands up and put parcelling around the nips of all the sheets. Rout Ringlin out. I told you to keep Kalashie watches. No watch below. What the hell you think this is, a steam-liner? Send him to see every nip in sheet or tack. Some of the headsails look as if they need overhauling. By God, must I stay on deck twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week to make the ship sail? Get moving!"

"I can sail your damned ship as well as you can! I only told you there was a ship under the lee bow," Martin retorted angrily. But he went about his job with a will; and he saw that other men worked, if not with a will at least with effect; and he did it, not because of Orson's bitter tongue, but because the ship was being splendidly sailed through howling impossibilities by a man who, if mad, was mad after a sailor's heart.

And Mr. Martin was suffering with recurring sea fever. Nancy Prouse, shivering in the chart-room door, wondered, and feared, and understood none of the hurly-burly except that her man was undoubtedly lord of all men around him, and something had happened to the ship, with reference to

that other ship, which made Mr. Martin chuckle and rub his hands as he started again to pace the poop just before Ringlin relieved him for the first watch.

CHAPTER XV

KALASHIE WATCH

ONCE in a driving burst of sleet that cut the faces and hands of the men and forced the hardiest to close his eyes for fear of blindness, the black loom of a grim coast abruptly menaced the *Kestrel's* southerly flight. For many days no sun or stars had pierced the dreary canopy of storm wrack to give Orson a check on his position. But that land was somewhere adjacent to the western entrance to Magellan Straits. There is no other land like it in all the bleak barrens of the southern seas. And for a sailing ship that was no place to be. The course was altered, the land cleared. More southing must be made before changing course eastward to double old Cape Stiff. But altering course forced Orson to brace in his yards; and that showed adversely on the log. For days of gale and blinding snow the ship had roared through murderous seas with yards almost square. The gales astern of her hounded her along at a speed which piled the bitter seas high at her stem until her flying kestrel figurehead barely skimmed the water. The yards were just sufficiently forward to give every sail a bursting full; and even Val Orson had been seen to smile when the squalls were fiercest, and his storming clipper was logging twenty-one knots.

Those were days to try the endurance of men. The *Kestrel's* big crew, poorly fed, vilely housed, clothed in meager rags, almost welcomed the cruel round of Kalashie watches for the very labor that made their blood keep circulating. A Kalashie watch simply means keeping all hands ready for necessary work, leaving for the future such things as cleaning ship or fine weather jobs, and keeping no such thing as watch-and-watch except for the helmsman and lookout.

Orson's little notion of putting chafing gear in the nip of the sheets was almost on a par with that other trick of certain rather mythical ship drivers of padlocking their sheets and halyards. Almost on a par, because the chafing gear naturally jammed the sheet in the sheave or block, and sail could neither be lowered nor flown without first clearing away the chafing gear. To do that a man must go aloft. Orson could stop that. Martin would stop it, too, since his sea fever struck him. Ringlin would stop it out of sheer admiration for the skipper's guts. Those old yarns about padlocking sheets and halyards lacked the similitude of truth, simply because padlocking them need not prevent any man cutting them away in the darkness if he wanted to, and he could do that on deck. But Orson's crew had ceased to care much about his terrific sail carrying. They grew to realize that this cracking on saved them a lot of fierce labor aloft so long as the gear held together.

But they had their burdens just the same. The forecastle was a den of icy darkness. The portholes were small and thick. Very rarely were they clear of swirling sea. The forecastle skylight was covered with tarpaulin and battened down to keep out the boarding seas. The doors, on the maindeck, were opened only when somebody had to enter or leave. And it was cold, wet, and utterly cheerless, with water sliming across the floor, bearing, besides the common débris of the ill-kept dungeon, bits of rotten wood wrenched from the ceilings and waterways by the ship's tremendous laboring.

A hawspipe had worked loose. Jets of water squirted in between the iron and the wood. Around the skylight coaming the water crept in too, regardless of battens and tarpaulin. Tobacco was wet; hardtack was moldy; as soon as the salt beef or pork or stockfish was cold, if any were left after a meal to serve for the next, it developed a scum and froze solid. Clothes never had a chance to dry, even when they could be taken off. Bedding, mostly straw, blankets, mainly cotton, stayed wet and stank like stable litter. Men stayed wet, and stank in spite of the sea's perpetual washing. They developed salt-water sores and boils; between fingers and toes deep fissures appeared, raw and torturing; and the ship was not yet up to the Horn.

On deck they were no better off. A dreary gang, far too beaten to do more than mutter of fighting, they huddled in whatever poor shelter they could

find on deck, shivering between spells of pumping, almost continuous now, and shambling around at the heels of the mates or bosun dragging out their souls on brace or sheet to trim the ship so that her hellion of a master might drive another tenth of a knot out of her wracked old fabric.

And the ship herself. Ice lay in glistening sheets along the decks, washed by boarding seas only to be frozen again. The galley was the only deck structure whose door was not always locked with ice. Even that was frozen shut whenever economy of fuel kept the stove cold for an hour. That was often. The lower rigging, in the thickening of the lanyards and deadeyes, was solid with packed snow and yelling with a fiendish beauty whenever the light caught it. Men chopped the ice away, saw it freeze again, and chopped over and over in intervals of pumping out water which froze as it laved their feet.

Sails were hard as boards or thin steel plates. Ropes at the blocks grew to grotesque proportions from the accumulation of moisture dripping down from wood and iron to hemp, until halyards and sheets, buntlines and clewlines, reef tackles and downhauls—every tackle or whip or runner or fall that had a lead through a block or sheave, had the appearance of a silver pipe blown into a bladder when hot and there solidified.

The yards were topped with ice. Jackstays and rovings were welded in one with the canvas. Parrals and trusses were just great bulging lumps of

frozen gout. Icicles a fathom long hung from stays and shrouds until some lurch of the ship snapped them; then they fell with a metallic crash, and the man who chanced to be underneath was unlucky.

Norris and Godwin had good clothes. None of the rest of the forecastle crowd had enough rags to cover them. Chips and the bosun were snug enough, but had nothing to spare for improvident sailors. There was no slopchest aft. Val Orson ran expenses in outfitting to the hole below minimum. Put to makeshift, men begged or stole old potato sacks and shreds of torn canvas; surreptitiously cut off strips of tarpaulin; made by the simple process of wrapping and lashing with spun yarn, foot-gear and head-gear, body covering for themselves, cursing, while they shivered far less than they would otherwise, the skipper and his ship, the mates and the weather; everything else except their own heedless foolishness ashore which sent them to sea again in a Cape Horner almost naked.

Aft, the ship was not quite so cruelly dreary. As long as there was no carrying away of gear the mates could remain on the poop. Little water came up there. Once or twice in the fiercest blasts of the following gale the *Kestrel* was pooped by the sea, but it was rarely, and she sailed too fast for more than a licking crest to overtake her. And the helmsman could keep dry too. And warm. No man who steered that storming clipper before such a wind and sea could ever be cold. A lee helmsman was

necessary most of the time, for not even the Greek, the best helmsman of them all, could hold her to her course in the heavier squalls, though he now possessed two sound arms, and had an overwhelming passion to be kept on the poop, within sound, sight and reach of Orson every possible moment. Whenever Orson was on deck, which was nearly always now, the Greek's eyes, sweeping from lofty upper leeches to the compass again, never failed to flicker for just one instant in passing upon the stalwart, formidable figure of the skipper.

Orson left the deck only to check up the reckoning, to pore over the chart, to read again for the hundredth time the book of passages, or to snatch a brief, uneasy sleep in the chartroom, fully dressed, with his salt-crusted mop of hair in Nancy's patient lap. His meals she brought up to him. She gently insisted that the steward make soups out of stores set by for emergency. She stole spare life-boat rations from the mate's room, so that her man might have hot chocolate, scalding beef-cube broth, to fortify him against the terrific ordeal he faced and seemed likely to go on facing. Nancy seemed to sleep as little as he. She seemed always around the chartroom. She ate her own frugal meals there, watching him through the window as she ate. She brought up sewing, and sewed through the day when his head was not in her lap, fashioning small garments, singing quietly to herself. Sometimes, when Orson entered abruptly, which was often, her song

would cease, the glow would die in her eyes and fear spring to life there. If he noticed her at such times it was but to grip her arm roughly and shove her out of the way. Never a word of kindness; never a glance; his life was centered upon the course his ship was making, on her speed, on her endurance.

Endurance was the word. The old *Kestrel* showed her age now. Every timber, knee, stanchion and beam complained, wept, wept dry rot. That crumbling fidhole aloft gave way so far that the rigging had to be set up while the ship was wallowing in a hellish broth of sea, to save the whole upper structure from tumbling about the ears of the miserable crew.

"Mister, go up there yourself, with the carpenter, and see what can be done to wedge up the weight off the fid," Orson told Martin. And Martin entered so far into the spirit of that driving ship master that he really did make some shift to bolster up the decaying spar. And when, one shrieking dawn that was only a more pallid night, the mizzen-topgallant sheet actually snapped at last, but jammed in the sheave with the chafing stuff, Orson stopped Ringlin as that blustery young second mate was about to leap for the halyards, bawling for the watch meanwhile, with a grip that hurt.

"Hold on. Maybe it's jammed so it will hold," he said hoarsely. The searching cold was getting to Orson too. In a minute he decided that the broken sheet would remain jammed until somebody

went up and cleared it. "Let it stand, Mister," he said. "Rotten gear'll never stop this ship."

Nancy went below after a long, cold vigil, feeling ill. She scarcely noticed that the saloon was warm and light with stove and lamps. Fumbling with her oversize wrappings with chilled hands, she gazed half nodding at the great deep, wide bunk behind the curtains. It should have looked snug and inviting to her aching body. It only looked vastly vacant. It made her shiver to think of lying all alone there, rolling from side to side as the ship labored. Shivering, she thought again of her man, the brute of a man who never had a soft look or kind word for her in the hurly-burly of driving his ship; the brute of a man who, nevertheless, was her husband, bound and tied by parson, ring, and Book. He never saw the bed. At least, he had never slept in it since the day when the old *Huntress* had almost overtaken the *Kestrel.* He paid Nancy no more attention than if she had been an image of wood instead of a girl full of warmth and vitality, whose duty lay in his service, whose duty was gladly and fully done whenever it was demanded. Nancy wondered dully if those other women had endured similar neglect; those colorful women of the East whose pictures he had so gleefully tortured her with.

But Nancy was his wife. Those others—well—

Nancy wrapped herself up again, and went back to the chartroom. She would stand Kalashie watch herself.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GREEK

THE *Kestrel* flew south. After a night of blasting squalls that tested her to the last fastening, the wind suddenly moderated to a mild breeze. Stars came out. The cold intensified. Orson brought out his sextant to take a star sight, calling Ringlin to take the chronometer time. But for the pale starlight the night was black. Only hoping that his star binocular might reveal a horizon for his observation, Orson brought down his star. And there was no horizon. Sweeping the glass around in a wide arc, he saw to the south and east a limitless line of dark irregularities. And something clattered along the ship's side. That could be seen as it tumbled away in the wake.

"Ice! Curse it!" he ejaculated savagely.

Ringlin waited at the chronometer.

"Damn you for a wooden man! What're ye waiting there for?" Orson roared at him. Ringlin shut the case and left the chartroom hurriedly. He no longer answered Orson back. There had been no outward show-down between the beefy, confident young second mate and the notorious hellion of a skipper; but daily intercourse had taught Ringlin much. He stood at the rail, keeping a lookout waiting for orders.

Soon the waning moon came up, pallid and weak; but its light opened up the vast southern ocean, and there was little of comfort in the view. Ice covered the sea. Cakes floated as far as eye could see; on the long rolling swells that sweep around Cape Horn they glistened in the moon rays. Between the breaths of the dying breeze the sharp, metallic clashing of hard ice filled the air. The ship rumbled to the passing of tons of ice cakes along her sides.

Dotted among the scattered drift ice a score of tall bergs loomed like castles, spires, sheer walls of murderous beauty, white and black. In daylight with the sun on them they would be silver and green. In the ship's track they seemed thickest, and the breeze remained a light air, sufficient to give the *Kestrel* steerage way, but scarcely enough to drive her through the clogging ice at a speed which gave her entire facility to avoid some of the greater bergs which assuredly held their most menacing bulk hidden beneath the sea. And while the breeze was at its gentlest, down came the snow.

Nancy brought up a jug of coffee, black and scalding. Her legs wanted to crumple under her. Her eyes were leaden and had black rings about them from sheer exhaustion. But she tottered to Orson's side with her jug. He took it without looking at her, drank down the bitter, staggering draft straight from the jug, and shoved it back to her.

"Go to your bed, kid," he told her harshly, still without a glance.

Nancy shivered in the companionway with her empty jug, watching him as he strode along the maindeck to the fore rigging. Both mates were on deck then. Martin stood beside the helm, where Norris steered, and Ringlin stood at the poop ladder head, with all hands clustered beneath him in the shelter of the halfdeck. And like a great spider against the cobwebbery of the mazy rigging Val Orson swarmed aloft to the fore upper-topsail yard, active as a lad of sixteen, powerful as a jungle ape, swinging himself from lower rigging to fore-top by sheer arm strength; taking the topmast rigging in great arm hauls four ratlines at a time; seeming to leap from rigging to yard surefooted and swift. Nancy watched until she saw him up there against the moonlight, secure and dark with the whirling snow thickening about him; then with a little sigh she went obediently below to her bed. She partly undressed for the first time in many nights. It was almost like a benediction to her simple soul when she heard the clear, far carrying voice of her man peal down through the frosty air from his lofty eerie:

"Clear water to the south'ard! Run her off two points!"

She heard men answer the shout. Ringlin was down the ladder in a jump, his lusty young roar driving men to the braces as the yards were squared

in more. Mr. Martin's cool tones gave the helmsman steering orders, and Norris repeated them in a voice as cool. It was all so vividly forced into Nancy's mind: that supreme competence of her man; that supreme confidence of the others in him. She took off all her clothes and went to bed to sleep like a babe, as secure in him as simple faith could make her.

For half an hour the *Kestrel* held on. There was no more wind. The snow fell straight down, like a feathery blanket. Orson could still be seen aloft between snow flurries, and he was covered all over with white until he could easily have been mistaken for the bunt of the sail had the sail been furled. If Orson was saying things to himself up there in the bitter white cold, they were said with superb restraint. Only when some lead was seen which might help extricate his ship did he make his voice heard.

"Ready 'bout ship!" he yelled once, when a little more wind drove the snow athwartships in a blinding screen.

"Ready 'bout ship, sir!" bawled back Martin, and helped to flatten in the spanker. Ringlin led his gang to tacks, sheets and braces. The ship had been sailing with checked yards, and in the light breeze she took a long time to come to the wind. The great courses were lifted to clear the rails. Men stood by the braces, waiting until she slammed her fore canvas into the mast. Then she came around fast; while that grim, snow-powdered figure on the

topsail yard held on imperturbably to the topsail tye, apparently careless of what the swinging yard might do to his hold. The mainyards were hauled, then:

"Let-go and haul, for'ard!" the mate sang out, and the fore braces were taken in at a run while the yards swept around. And still the silent figure aloft kept his place, though when the fore topsails filled on the new tack he must have been jerked into the sea but for his tenacious hold on the tye. And when the yards were trimmed, and the head-sheets shifted over, he gave his orders in the same imperturbable voice:

"Steady as she heads now, and stand by to tack ship again."

The breeze strengthened again; and with it the snow turned into a blizzard. Men shivered on the maindeck. On the poop the helmsman was blue. The mates went below by turns and put on more clothes. Poorly clad men grumbled. But there were two men who seemed impervious to cold. The Greek stood ever at the forerigging, between jobs. Orson remained aloft as motionless as if he were clothed in some non-conducting garment that would let none of the body heat escape.

"I bet 'e's got a flarsk up there!" stuttered Tredway once to the Greek as they finished coiling the gear after another tack.

"He is the devil himself, and he will not get cold," the Greek grinned. But Tredway always

went back to his corner nearest the poop after a job was done. The Greek never went a step farther away from the forerigging.

Right through the bitter night the ship was directed in her passage by that silent, motionless figure on the topsail yard. Toward morning the blizzard intensified. It was cruel, fiendish even in sheltered places. Time after time the voice aloft would call down:

"Tack ship, Mister!" and around the yards would be dragged, with never a song, with never a yelp of enthusiasm. Only the growling, ominous thunder of the ice alongside urging on men who were long past willingness. Then at times:

"Wear ship! Ice close aboard!"

And again braces and sheets and tacks were manned, and the dreary business of coiling up a mass of gear gone through again.

Men spoke about Orson in low tones. Men who had cursed him most heartily admitted that he was sticking to the job like a man. There were men who even said that without him up aloft there, the ship could never have come through the night. Godwin gave Tredway a stiff jolt in the back and said:

"See? That's how tough he is."

"Yes, and you and that mate o' yourn 's proper scared of him. Proper old windbags, you two are, my oath!"

"Not scared, little man, but proud to sail with

a man of his guts," Godwin retorted, with another jolt that made Tredway cough and curse him.

"Guts! It's his own blessed ship, ain't it? Why shouldn't he stop up there? He ain't arf starved and naked like us pore blokes. It ain't guts. It's fear o' losin' his bleedin' old ballyhoo!"

"If he lost his ship you'd lose yer worthless life, so shut up!" growled a sailor who never said much. Tredway moved forward. He hated his shipmates, for nobody seemed to want his company. Groves had insinuated himself into the galley and was not on hand during the last two maneuvers of wearing ship, and Groves alone showed any tendency to forgather with the little sea-lawyer. Tredway meant to shout out the news when the ship tacked or wore again, and have Groves pulled out to do his share. Meanwhile, there was the Greek, standing alone by the forerigging. Tredway would talk to him for company.

"Go away! I will kill you if you stay here!" the Greek muttered vehemently as Tredway touched him and spoke. Tredway stared up into the man's face. In the gray of rising dawn the Greek looked like a fiend from a frozen hell. His teeth gleamed, and his hand was at his belt. Like a rat the little man scurried back to his shipmates.

"Bli'me! The Greek's gorn potty!" he gasped. "Said he'd slit me bloomin' throat, he did! Gawd!"

"Can't blame him," retorted Godwin, dryly.

"Why?" Tredway almost screamed, full of fright. Ringlin appeared at the ladder then:

"Give the pumps a whirl, me lads! Warm you up. Hop to it, sons."

Dumbly the men trooped to the pumps, jostling each other, without regard for watches or turns. All night they had been on deck, alternately chilled to the marrow and sweating at the gear. Sweat froze on them; the cold had no longer power to hurt them. Beyond a certain point the cold just numbed them.

"Can't you raise a tune between you?" Ringlin shouted, putting his lusty young strength to the handle. "Hey, Godwin, you ain't dumb. Start something. There's the Old Man up there for six hours freezing stiff, and he ain't sulking. Come on, now."

Godwin was at the wheel end of the handles, looking forward, and as he hove at the pump his eyes were fastened upon the motionless Greek.

"Groves is in the galley, sojering," squealed Tredway. "And there's the Greek, loafin', too."

"The Greek'll be in the next gang. I'll get Groves," returned the second mate, crisply. "Start that song, Godwin," he said as he pulled open the galley door to bring out Groves.

"There's a girl asleep with a blue dress on,
Shake her, Johnny, shake her!"

There was little response so far. The Reverend Groves was hustled from the galley, and flung among the pumping gang.

"An unsafe couch she's resting on,
Shake her, and so wake her!"

went on Godwin.

Ringlin joined in; and a voice or two crept sheepishly in. No doubt the song helped the work, no matter how unwillingly sung.

"Storm clouds gather on every hand,
Shake her, Johnny, shake her!
Ratch her off to clear the land,
Shake her, and so wake her!"

"That's the stuff, bullies!" roared Ringlin. "Sooner you clear her the sooner you go below. Round with her, old sons!"

"On deck!" pealed Orson's voice, as clear and piercing as if he had not been perched up there in a blizzard for six hours. "Open water to the eastward and south. Hold her as she goes. Let that gang pump her free and then send them below."

"Hear that, my sons? Rattle her around!" the second mate encouraged them. "There's a captain for you! Send you below while he's still on the job. Sing out, Godwin."

"I bet he's just about goin' ter murder us wiv work soon as he comes down!" grumbled Tredway.

"Lying asleep there on the deck;
Shake her, Johnny, shake her!
No thought of sea or storm or wreck,
Shake her and so wake her!"

Godwin sang, and singing watched the Greek. Suddenly the Greek moved. The rigging shook. Down through the swirling snow clambered Orson, and he moved stiffly, uncertainly, as if frozen. He blundered when crossing the foretop, and seemed about to fall.

"Give us the rest o' the song!" cried Ringlin, heaving more than his weight at the pump, as much for the warmth engendered as for encouragement. But Godwin was scarcely conscious of pumping himself, and singing was out of his mind. Through the half light of dawn and snow flurries he saw Orson reach the sheerpole and turn to swing down to the deck. And the Greek sprang forward as Orson let go his hand-hold.

Steel flashed. There was a choking cry, the Greek struck downward with his sheath knife at Orson's neck. As swiftly as the Greek sprang, so Godwin left the pump and darted forward. It all happened in a matter of seconds. Ringlin was swift to see something was doing; and after Godwin he plunged. Godwin reached the forerigging, with hands reaching out for the Greek, and the second mate reaching out for him, at the moment when Val Orson staggered under the stroke of the knife. The

rest was so staggering sudden that Ringlin's hand was on Godwin's collar, and Godwin's hand was almost touching the Greek, when Orson gripped his assailant's arm in both hands and wrenched at it. The Greek's agonized yell went up among the tall spars hidden in snow. Twice that arm had been broken by the same hands. The knife stroke must have failed. Nobody saw at the moment whether Orson was stricken or not. All any one saw was that Orson suddenly shifted his grip from the Greek's arm to his throat, and, with a face so cold, so devoid of expression that it looked like the face of death, slowly throttled out the man's life as he stood.

He let go and the man dropped to the deck.

"Have Chips bundle him up and dump him," was all Orson said, and without a second glance at the dead man walked aft, tugging the knife out of the stiff collar of a leather jacket he wore beneath his oilskins. Men who had believed him a devil, men who had been almost ready to believe him simply a superman, bent over their pumping and watched him affrightedly as he passed. He walked with difficulty. He was undoubtedly half paralyzed with cold and exposure. Yet he drew forth the knife and tossed it overboard without a sign that he realized how near it had come to letting out his life. And when he reached the poop, and the steward, hastily called by the mate, stood there ready to anticipate his needs, all that Orson said was:

"Keep a good lookout, and hold her to the course you're steering, Mister. And, steward, rouse out that woman of mine and send her up with some black coffee and biscuit."

All he did was to spread out the chart, holding down one edge with the book of record passages, and, his forefinger on the place of the last sure position, glower darkly at the place he believed the ship must be now after the varying courses of the night. Precious days were wasting. Ice lay wherever he would sail, except in the direction away from his course. Precious days!

CHAPTER XVII

RUMBLINGS

CHIPS sewed up the dead Greek in a bit of old sail, and duly ballasted him for launching with a fathom of rust-pitted cable. Norris was slowly thawing out after his long spell at the helm, and the process was painful. Norris was in no mood for jest. He saw no humor in Godwin's yarn about how Ringlin had thought that he, Godwin, meant to pile into Orson too, when he was actually going to the skipper's assistance.

"Why wouldn't he think you meant to jump the Old Man?" Norris growled, painfully rubbing his icy feet. "Who here would want to stop anybody slipping the steel into that black-souled swine? Eight hours I stood at that bloody wheel!"

"Six hours he sat up there on the tops'l yard. If he hadn't, where 'ud you and all of us be now?" Godwin persisted. He hated Orson for a shark-blooded tyrant; but he had to admire his sheer grit; and he knew that Norris would feel as he felt when the cold was out of his bones. And there was neither grog nor fire in the forecastle to speed the process.

"Yus, an' he corpses the Greek, pore beggar, an' sez, 'dump 'im,' just like that!" bleated Tredway.

Groves was scraping out the bread-barge, trying to think up some excuse for going aft without danger to himself. He believed Orson might be persuaded to unbend a bit, since his ordeal aloft must have warned him of the effects of bitter cold. Tredway's shrill complainings had lately irritated the once reverend. Now they touched a note that found responsive echoes. "Just like a sack o' spuds, he sez, dump 'im!" the little sea-lawyer went on, almost screaming now. "I sez to Chips, I sez, 'ain't he goin' to read 'im a piece out o' the bleedin' Bible?' I sez, and Chips sez, 'Bloody lucky to 'ave a funeral at all, tryin' to knife a bloke!' Bli'me! Didn't he arsked to be knifed? A shame he wuzn't, that's wot I say. And like a sack o' spuds—"

"He shan't be dumped like a sack of spuds, little man," Groves cut in. "I'm going to volunteer to read the service over him. There may be rum in it for me. There's a long chance I may get some for the crowd."

Groves watched his chance and ran aft. Daylight was trying to flood the sky. Only the snow seemed more visible. Sea and sky were slaty gray. Bits of ice floated past as the ship sped down wind. In the lee of the maindeck, snow lay knee deep everywhere but in the course of the water from the pumps. There a gully of ice cut the snow. Far to the northeast a pale patch of lighter gray revealed where the sun might be; but only between blanket-like swirls of driving snow. Groves mounted the poop ladder

and was at the chartroom door before the officer of the watch had seen him. Orson leaned over the chart table, one hand at his throat, the other on the chart. His eyes were glittering, and the brows above them lowered in a black scowl. Nancy stood at one side, holding a coffee jug. The steward came up the saloon companionway as Groves appeared at the door.

The steward had a storekeeper's billy in his hand, and he looked frightened. Orson slammed down a hand on the chart savagely, and the steward dropped the billy with a clatter. The noise caused Orson to swing around, white faced and angry. Forestalling any outburst, the steward blurted out:

"A whole cask o' beef is bad, captain! Opened it just now. No brine in it. Stinks, it do. Stores is proper short now. What'll I—"

"Head it up. It'll get eaten yet, and with gratitude," Orson snapped, uttering a harsh little laugh that might be defiance of Fate, or humorous anticipation. He took his hand from his throat, and Nancy, whose eyes never left him for a moment, started forward with a little cry.

"Oh, you're bleeding!" she murmured. Her fingers went to his collar, ripping it open in spite of his irritable protest. "Why, Val, it's a nasty wound! Who did it? Do come down and let me dress it. The cold will turn it into a dangerous sore."

All of poor Nancy Prouse's training surged back upon her. She had been reared where poultices

might be said to be always ready; where every springtime a huge pot of brimstone-and-treacle inevitably appeared, with a terrifying Squeerslike wooden spoon stuck in it, and a terrifying, Squeerslike aunt or grandmother saw that every juvenile member of the family got properly dosed; where a whitlow called for hot bread poultice, and a boil demanded linseed; mustard baths for a cold had been part of her home curriculum. Her pretty, simple, gentle face was full of a vast motherliness as she pulled at his sleeve. Her big, innocent eyes held deeps of motherhood that seemed to reach far beyond mere solicitude for the hard man who had coolly stolen and held her. Something about her made Orson stare down at her anxious face, and he nearly smiled. He actually moved to follow her urging. Groves believed his opportune moment had come. He stepped forward, one finger boldly touching Val Orson's shoulder.

"Captain, sir, our messmate is about to be buried, and the men are uneasy because the poor soul is to go overboard without a prayer."

Orson grinned, without any suggestion of merriment.

"What the hell's a prayer to a murderer?" he asked. "You say some prayers over him if you like. You've got a Bible for'ard, haven't you?"

"Yes, a Swedish Bible, captain," returned Groves quickly, and glanced at Nancy. Orson's grin turned

to something almost wolfish. But Groves was taking no more chances.

"I can read the service over the body, sir, and shall gladly do so. It is terrible to think of a soul launched into the beyond without benefit of clergy." He hurried to finish, because Orson was already on the stairs, led by Nancy. "It'll be cruelly cold there on deck, sir, and I shall be bareheaded," he said.

Groves nearly stopped breathing in the instant after his hint was out. He had vivid recollections about that other occasion where a Swedish Bible and grog went hand-in-hand. Strangely, Orson did not swing on him. Instead, he spoke to the steward over his shoulder, while slowly descending the stairs in Nancy's wake.

"Give all hands a tot o' grog. It'll help their bellies to stand the news when rations are cut down. Give this hellbender a double allowance, and tell me if he gets saucy again."

The once reverend Groves hurried forward with the glad news. Men stared at him in astonishment. Some cursed him; called him liar and unholy joker; but they followed when he went aft, and they found the steward there with grog. And they trooped forward again, in the driving snow, at the heels of Groves, to speed the Greek into the icy sea. They stood bareheaded, at the command of Groves. Neither the mate nor Orson appeared; but young Ringlin was callow enough to feel a little

awed still, and he stood there too, though he did not remove his cap until Groves sonorously intoned:

"We therefore now commit this body to the deep, to be turned into corruption—"

Groves was reading from memory. His book was written in Swedish, and, besides, was a Bible, and not a prayer book.

"Bli'me! That ain't in the Bible!" muttered Tredway quite audibly. The little sea-lawyer was shivering, in spite of the grog, but the grog had given him courage, and that let loose his swivel-hung tongue.

" 'E's makin' it up, he is. The law says—"

"Through our Lord Jesus Christ—" Groves went on, pushing a stiff forefinger into Tredway's skinny chest and capsizing him among his mates.

"Get a move on and let him slide!" said Ringlin sharply. Groves gave him a reproachful glance, impudently trading upon his present employment, which Ringlin silently vowed to get square for later on. The men's bare heads were powdered with snow. They shuddered in the biting wind. Chips and the bosun at the head of the hatch cover which supported the body alone seemed to be at ease; perhaps the double tot of rum they had received from the steward had more to do with that than any influence the late reverend Groves' reading might have. At the second mate's sharp interruption they lifted the bier a foot or so, tilting it almost to the point where the corpse must slide from under the

flag. Tredway started forward choking with a fearful gasp of apprehension. The ship sped along. There was no suggestion of backing mainyards for the Greek. Ice tingled and crackled all along the ship's sides.

"That it may be like His glorious body—" intoned Groves, nose in air, eyes looking down upon the pages of the Book he could not read. And then the ship rolled. The body slid. The folds of the flag rippled as the corpse passed under it, and over the side it went, before Chips or the bosun knew it, and Tredway ran to the rail and glared after it white-faced.

"He never said no prayer. He never said Amen!" he squealed. "Poor bloke gets dumped just like a sack o' spuds, just like I said. Bad'll come of it. You see." Tredway was standing on the only spare spar left, staring along the track of the ship among the ice cakes. He yelped suddenly, like a dog that is hurt, and his shipmates ran to his side growling.

"There! Look!" Tredway squealed, one skinny hand outflung astern.

Fast as the ship sped, and thick though the snow drove, before distance cast a merciful curtain between them the men of the flying *Kestrel* could see a broad raft of ice swirling from under the ship's counter, bearing upon it the long canvas bundle which was the Greek.

Men trooped into the forecastles, those off watch.

Others resumed the dreary grind at the pumps. Groves went aft to report his duty done and to receive the second portion of his double tot of rum. Tredway crept into his bunk and buried his head under the damp blanket, biting the straw pillow to smother his weeping. It was Groves who uncovered him, and started to reason with him out of the wisdom engendered by two stiff hookers of forty overproof rum. And Tredway had lost all his sea-lawyer volubility. He listened to Groves for fifteen minutes without a reply, choking back sobs of nervous terror, until Norris, only partly thawed out yet, roughly bade him clap stoppers on to his weeper, and advised Groves to keep his sermonizing for the next funeral.

"If your buddy hadn't been so damned slow, it would have been a real funeral this time: Orson's funeral," Groves retorted loftily. He really floated high upon a roseate cloud of rich Jamaica sugar spirit. "Only Godwin's flannel feet saved Orson and killed the Greek. Good shipmate, too, the Greek was. Many's the time he stood my wheel."

Godwin laughed contemptuously. He had just succeeded in convincing Norris that he had tried to save Orson: out of no love for the skipper, but simply on the impulse of a decent sailorman who admires grit in a man and hates steel in the settlement of a grievance unless both parties wield it.

"If I had been any quicker the Greek would have died quicker, that's all," he said. "Remember that,

too, any of you bold buckos who might think sometime of jumping the Old Man. He's a he-man, Orson is, and nobody puts steel to him while I'm within jumping distance, unless he starts something himself. The Greek tried to murder him."

"God's truth, and why wouldn't he?" screamed Tredway in frenzy. "Ain't he a hellion? Ain't he working our guts out, and starvin' us, and freezin' us o' cold? And ain't the pore bleedin' Greek a-sailin' this blessed minute atop o' the sea wivout a prayer said over 'im. 'E'll sail 'til the albatrosses picks 'is bones clean, 'e will, an' then the soul of 'im 'll go into a shark as 'll foller this here ship 'til some pore bloke falls overboard and—"

"Hush!" Groves soothed the little man, patting his head paternally. "We must bear and forbear, my son. The Father above is looking down upon us—"

"Wot do I care?" Tredway squealed fiercely. "Wot good do that do us? 'E only looks sideways on the likes o' us pore blighters. If we wuz men, we—"

"Sh! I cannot listen to such talk." Groves put on a great assumption of probity and righteousness. There was nothing he wanted more than to hear the crew express their hatred of Orson and weariness of the ship. But he wanted the expression to be unanimous and spontaneous, so that there might be no doubt about it. And while Norris and Godwin remained aloof to suggestions of active discon-

tent, the time was not fully ripe. He did know, however, or believed he knew, how to stir the two young seamen into a different frame of mind, and he had his chance now, when a young ordinary seaman staggered in carrying the breakfast coffee-kettle and bread-barge. The lad slammed both down on a sea chest.

"Ain't nothink else, only cawfee and hardtack," he said dully.

"Wot?" yelped the sea-lawyer, aroused out of his dismals by any cause for complaint. "No 'ash?"

"Hardtack and cawfee, th' doctor sez," the lad retorted, filling his own pannikin with bitter coffee, and drawing no wordy penalty from his elders, all too stricken to notice.

"I'll see about it," snarled Tredway, and started for the door, bound aft.

"Better not," Groves advised him, holding on to the little man's shirt. Groves was still full of the warmth and elation of the rum, and felt tremendously superior to his place just then. He was filled with a benevolent paternalism toward his fellows; but he wanted to be the pater in his own way, and that way led toward the gentle coercion of Norris and Godwin away from their astounding and stupid objection to small-ganging Val Orson.

"Better not go aft about a trifle like food—"

"Trifle? Bloody wars!" howled a hungry sailor who crouched over the bread-barge with unbelieving eyes. "Trifle d'ye call it? Ain't we been starved

all the passage? Have we ever got even our full whack, leave alone anything over? Now there's no hash, no nothing for breakfast, but bloody cockroach-juice and pantiles! If he won't go aft I will."

"I repeat, you had better not go, my son," Groves insisted gently. "I was aft a while ago. Didn't I get rum for all hands, when I might easily have got it for myself only?"

"He's right. He got us rum," growled the sailor who never said much, with a scowl directed at the grumbler. Groves went on, in a wonderfully suave tone that was calculated to soothe ruffled spirits.

"I was aft, and I heard the steward report that a full cask of beef had been opened and found rotten because the brine had leaked out of it. Eat your biscuit, and be glad the hardtack tank is not empty yet. Didn't you all see when the Old Man was stabbed? Was he ruffled at all? Wasn't he the coolest man in the ship, and just down from six hours aloft, too? D'ye think you won't smell hell if you go to him now? Wait. There'll come the time when you get no beef for dinner, and that'll be the time to brace him. I'll brace him myself, and if I can get rum out of him I can get meat. Patience, my sons, patience."

"Patience! Yer full o' booze, yuh blarsted 'oly bloater! Wot if you ain't got no teeth, same as me?" growled an old man whose bootless feet

boasted no other protection from freezing seas than burlap bags wrapped and lashed about them.

"I'd soak my hardtack in coffee, old man," Groves retorted gravely; but under the gravity was elation. Other men were growling. Norris and Godwin looked blackly at the cheerless breakfast. A leaven was at work. A leaven of sour protest. And men who had dumbly endured the bitter weeks of cruel labor, of putrid food and bleak, wet, comfortless beds, found themselves now right up against a wall of hardship and hunger which seemed to be the ultimate limit of their docile endurance.

"Yus, soak yer 'ardtack in cawfee and thank the bloomin' Lord yer alive, same as Mister Bleedin' Groves would," squealed Tredway, glaring viciously around the forecastle. "The bleedin' 'ymn-singin' rum swiper!"

Groves rolled into his bunk to get ahead on sleep. He knew it was more than likely that all hands would be called again before the watch was up; but he smiled as he closed his eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII

TWO FACES

At the end of a long southerly board which brought the ship into fiercer cold, the ice stretched solid as a cliff ahead of her. There was wind to spare. Only the scattered ice kept the seas down. But now the wind shifted to the westward, and the ice to the east and north parted, leaving a wide open channel straight in the course Orson wanted to go.

"We'll wear ship, Mister, and put the muslin onto her," he told the mate. The men still spent dreary hours at the pumps. Some of the ice had battered the old hull very hard. There were men there whose sack-wrapped feet and legs were frozen into huge bundles of indistinguishable ugliness, and beneath the ugliness was agony. Men there were whose hands and feet were raw with cold sores and sea cuts, whose every action was torture. The old seaman who had mourned lack of teeth when forced to eat hardtack alone, now found biscuit soaked in even hot water as much as he could manage to swallow; for scurvy had made its appearance, first revealing itself in the old fellow's puffed and bleeding gums. Yet these men must obey when orders were given, for their lives were in the hands of that cold devil aft, who alone could bring them safely

out of the frozen fastness the ship had been forced into.

"Ready to wear ship! Hands aft and brail in the spanker!" the mate roared; and at the same time Ringlin led a gang to the main clew-garnets to haul up the main sail. The crojick was already stowed. Orson himself watched the helm, and as the ship fell off before the stiff breeze, the after yards were braced and the foreyards and headsails swung and shifted until the wind was on the other side and the old *Kestrel* gathered speed to the northward with a howling beam wind.

"Put the courses to work, Mister, and get the topgallants'ls and stays'ls on her," Orson ordered. And men trooped sullenly from rope to rope at the heels of mates who tried to show enthusiasm in the face of another prospect of cruel over-driving of the wracked ship. With the wind strong and increasing, and the sea rising as the ice diminished, the ship leaned down to leeward and groaned with the burden of water-soaked timber within her holds. She was less quick to recover than she had been at the beginning of the passage. Water had washed among her freight too long. And every added pound of sail pressure increased the terrific drag of her burden.

"Get a move on with the canvas, Mister, and pump her clear of water," snapped the skipper. He stood at the poop rail, his knuckles white with the stress of his grip. A black frown darkened his gaze.

Every few minutes he glanced at the rushing water alongside. From time to time, when another sail had been sheeted home, hoisted and trimmed, he strode aft to look at the patent log dial. Tredway stood at the wheel, blue and shivering, and terror had as much to do with his state as the cold. Every time Orson passed him, glancing into the binnacle as he stepped to the taffrail to see the log, the virulent little sea-lawyer's lips moved soundlessly; as if rehearsing some depths of legal warning in case Orson should find harsh fault with the steering. And it seemed possible that Tredway's fears might materialize, for the ship had a strong true gale abeam, and she could steer a compass course quite easily if only the proper hand was on her wheel. But Orson appeared to find nothing amiss with the steering. He nodded when the last upper staysail was set and sheeted home. The cold gray seas rushed along her side; the fly-wheel of the log spun so fast that the spokes disappeared and the thing looked like a transparent disk.

Then Orson left the ship to the care of the mate, and went into the chartroom. The men of both watches, still keeping Kalashie watch, split themselves into three gangs, and one gang began the dreary grind of pumping. But there was no chantey raised. Bitter water froze about the men's feet. At each thump of a windward sea, heavy sprays flew athwart the ship, and froze where they fell. The men at the windward pump wheel were speedily

coated in glittering mail. The higher flying sprays struck rigging and sails, and the drops as they froze formed stalactites that grew fast enough for growth to be visible, and kept men in fear of their falling when grown to perilous weight.

It was the third day of hardtack breakfasts. Supper had also been cut down. Every other day a small pan of hash was made for each watch; but the meat was bad, the hardtack crawling with weevils; the preserved vegetables had never been very good, and now they were moldy. Mr. Martin was used to driving crews. He had heard every sort of growl a sailorman could put up. Most growling he took as part of his job, and quite as part of the deepwater sailor's personality. On that last record-breaking passage from the East he had seen men driven to frenzy by Orson's methods; but at least there had been no real shortage of food then. Now even the cabin went short of many things hitherto considered necessaries. Martin knew that Orson and Nancy themselves had only the same food as the mates. Nancy might contrive some little change of diet out of sheer ingenuity, but the base was the same as all the afterguard had; and the steward had repeatedly said, in answer to complaints of one or other of the mates, that all the food in the ship came out of one stock. There were no grades, no different qualities.

"He ought to serve rum once a day anyhow. There's plenty," Martin muttered to himself when

a sudden blast of rising wind made him shiver, and a sheet of spray that was frozen when it hit flew over the rail and drenched and cut the toiling wretches at the pumps.

"I hope the swine goes to a Rooshian hell, where boilin' brimstone freezes!" screamed the old, old man whose scurvied gums had gotten him no pity. He still labored at the pumps with the rest, though scarcely able to keep his feet. And Groves chided him, in a voice to be heard above the whine of the wind and the roar of the leaping seas.

"Raise not thy voice against thy lawfully appointed master, but endure the cross for His name's sake!"

The frenzied old sailorman squealed like a wounded animal, let go the pump brake and tottered over to Groves, raising both hands high and bringing them down with pitiful anger upon his tormentor's shoulder, missing his head. Groves dodged, and laughed contemptuously. The old chap fell forward, and collapsed among the drenched and frozen legs of his shipmates, ill beyond all bearing.

"What's the matter with that man?" the mate shouted.

"Dying of starvation and hardship!" Groves bawled back.

"Take him for'ard— Not all of you! Two can carry him. Pump, the rest o' you!"

Martin watched the men stagger into the fore-

castle with the sick man. He wanted to tell Orson about it; to suggest some leniency for the driven crew. But he hesitated. Val Orson sat at the chart table, his head on one hand, a pair of dividers in the other hand, and there was a heavy frown on his brow. The *Kestrel* was many days behind a record now, after being forced so far to the southward. And all that extra distance had still to be made up. As he sat there, with the port light behind his head, he presented an aspect which had no attractions for Martin. The mate was not much given to deep thought where his captain was concerned. He had known Orson for some time, had seen his ways and knew his tremendous capacity for trouble making. He had not cared to examine very closely into Orson's apparent moods for a long time. He stood there, outside the deck-house companionway in which was the chartroom, and only half glanced inside, carefully keeping outside Orson's range of vision until he could make up his mind to enter and beard the lion in his den.

"Read the log, Mister!"

Martin started sharply. Orson spoke without moving, and in a level, matter-of-fact tone which plainly said he had been aware of Martin's presence all the time.

"Well?"

The word was shot out. Martin at last moved out of his startled halt, and hurried to the taffrail. And before he moved back he made quite sure that

he had read the log correctly. When he reported the mileage to Orson he blurted out the news about the sick man, and stated his opinion that the men were too hard driven. Orson did not turn upon him as he half expected. Orson did not look up until he had jotted down the log reading and measured the distance off with rulers and dividers on the chart. Then he glanced quickly at Martin.

"Go for'ard and see what's the matter with that man," he said. "If it's anything serious tell me. If not, put the old soldier back to work. And tell that man Groves to take a round turn with his long tongue, or I'll shorten it for him."

The mate went forward between sprays, and wonder was predominant in his mind. Orson had not broken out in furious vituperation. He had spoken quietly. His gaze was only a trifle grim; not at all menacing. Martin wondered if the skipper could be getting sick. Then he reached the forecastle, entered, and in one minute was running aft with tight lips. He forgot to stop and give Groves the skipper's message.

"It's scurvy!" he jerked out, filling the chart-room doorway. Orson looked sharply at him, and carefully weighted down the chart with books and rulers before standing up.

"I suppose you know what scurvy's like, Mister?"

"Ay, as well as any man!" Martin retorted. There was something rather terrible in the thought of scurvy falling upon that ship with her ill-nourished

crew and her hell-bent commander driving Hornwards through the bitter seas of the South. He did know what scurvy was like, too. He had seen plenty of it. The very idea of it might well make any man shudder in that ship.

"Did you tell the man Groves what I told you to?"

"I forgot, sir," stammered Martin, puzzled at Orson's attitude. Why did the man stop to bother about Groves, when scurvy was breeding in his ship? Orson buttoned his watch coat.

"I'll send Groves aft to you. Tell him. I'll look at the scurvy case myself," he said.

Men bent over their pumping when somebody growled that the Old Man was coming forward. Orson rarely left the poop. For a swift instant Groves had roseate visions of arousing the whole crowd to jumping in and doing what the Greek failed lamentably to do on the very last occasion when Orson went forward. Then Orson paused by the pumps, and Groves was staggered to hear himself addressed.

"Go aft to the mate, Groves. He has something for you that'll do you good," Orson remarked, and Groves hurried away with a wide grin of anticipation to the envy of his mates. The skipper went on and entered the forecastle. He was there no longer than the mate had remained. But Groves was back at the pumps when he returned aft, and there was no

grin on the once reverend's face behind the skipper's back; there was evil and threat.

"Have that sick man brought aft," Orson ordered when he reached the poop. And while Martin, himself dazed with astonishment, told off men to obey the astounding order, Val Orson went below and made the steward and Nancy prepare a spare berth for a hospital.

"Got any potatoes left, steward?" he asked.

"A few little withered, 'uns, sir. I was keepin' 'em for the missus's hash."

"Got any lime-juice? Or vinegar?"

"Ain't no lime-juice, sir. Plenty o' vinegar, though, and mighty sour it is too. Two voyages old."

"Get a couple of potatoes, and some vinegar. Nancy, you'll have to nurse a sick old man who's likely lousy too. Give him a wash first. I'll tell you what to treat him with. And, steward, how much sugar is there, or molasses?"

"There's them two bags o' bad sugar you got in Java, sir. Them as got wet. Ain't much molasses left. Ain't much good sugar, neither."

The old sailor was carried aft while Orson was crushing to pulp two wrinkled potatoes. Fear sat heavily upon the ancient shellback's pained face when Orson bent over him, examining him in the brighter light of the cabin.

"Open your mouth."

Tremblingly the swollen gums parted. They were

bleeding, and receding from the few yellow teeth remaining in them. Orson took the potato-juice on his fingers and began to rub the gums. Wherever his finger pressed the impression remained. There was no resiliency in the sick flesh. But the old man greedily licked at the juice, swallowing all he could get. A painful greediness for raw potatoes was in his filmy eyes. When all the pulp and juice were used up, Orson straightened up.

"Look after him now, you two," he told Nancy, indicating the steward with a nod. "Get him clean first. Then see that he takes half a glass of vinegar and sugar every time you feed him, and feed him flour gruel. Give him a shot of rum, hot, before he goes to sleep for the night. And, steward, 'til further orders, serve out to all hands a tot of rum every noon, but make 'em drink a whack of vinegar and sugar first. See they drink it, mind."

Orson went to the chartroom, and Martin found himself casting frequent glances inside. As Orson sat scanning the log book, or reading over for the hundredth time some part of Maury's passage book, or for minutes at a time gazing up through a window at his ship's lofty towers of spar and canvas, he presented a picture which Martin for the first time found fascinating. Martin believed he knew Val Orson well. When he sailed from port on this second voyage with him, he knew he was going on a voyage which would be no bed o' roses or chapel of ease. And he had believed that Orson was simply

and only a driver, a bucko, a man-killer for no other reason than sheer callousness and love of power over men. Now he wondered if that estimate was correct.

Where Orson sat, the light of a porthole was right behind his head, and the resulting profile was sharp and vivid. There were high lights on the nose and forehead, and the strong chin; the deep, keen eyes reflected lights whenever they were raised to look aloft. Orson had removed his sealskin cap; his hair was rumpled and unruly. There was a tinge of gray here and there among the black. Strongly lined that face was, at the corners of the eyes, at the ends of the mouth, beside the nose. Yet, just at that moment, Martin could see nothing of brutality there.

There was a great deal of the eagle in that face; but nothing of the vulture. Martin dared not linger there, staring. He paced the poop, keeping a sailorly eye over the ship, the sea, and the weather; watching the steering, careful that the pumping gang kept at work. But at every turn he paused for a brief moment, and glanced again at the face against the porthole. And the more he looked, the less he wondered at Orson's action toward the old seaman sick of the scurvy. He wondered, actually, why he ever thought Orson tough, and hard, and cruel. There, in Val Orson's daytime face, dwelt pride, if pride ever dwelt in any man's face. There, too, dwelt affection. Yearning was there.

And even Martin, dull though he was in such matters, could detect the object of them all. Even Martin was not fool enough to think that Orson was coming into tender mood over Nancy Prouse. No, this was some deeper, vaster love that thralled Val Orson. It, or the object of it, had deepened those lines on his grim face. It, or the object of it, eradicated from that face at that instant all suggestion of brutality, evil, or callousness.

"Crazy about the ship!" muttered Martin at last. "Damned if I don't believe he says his prayers to her picture!"

Mr. Martin's musings were summarily ended by Orson's abrupt appearance at his side as he turned at the after end of his short walk. Bareheaded and without his coat the skipper was; and he faced the stinging wind and spray as if it were summer breeze and morning mist.

"How is the water, Mister? Gaining still?" he inquired.

"The fresh gang cleared her, sir. They just about hold it down when fresh, and it gains on them toward the end of their spell."

"Change gangs oftener. And go along once in a while and see they're not sojering. There's men enough in this ship to eat her. Set the main royal and flying jib when Ringlin comes on deck. The ship hasn't a chance, the way she's handled."

"Yes, sir," Martin replied. But as Orson went into the companionway to go below the mate dashed

his cap on the deck, glared after him, and muttered.

"Oh, you beauty! You sweet-scented hellion! The way she's handled! Men enough to eat her! That's about all they get to eat. It's your other face you showed me then, damn and blast your guts!"

CHAPTER XIX

NANCY SINGS

Orson looked in at the sick man when he went below. The old sea warrior was asleep, uneasily asleep, as if even unconsciousness could not make him forget his troubles. Or perhaps he could not forget that Val Orson, the driving hellion, had brought him aft into the cabin; perhaps the wonder of that could not wipe out the fear that some dark motive underlay the action. Orson frowned, then grimaced, to see this ancient bit of sea-broken humanity lying clean and warm in a cabin bunk; for Nancy had gone the limit in her ministrations, and one of Orson's own shoregoing silk shirts clung to the withered old body, moving flutteringly to the uneven, scanty breathing. A sheet was on the bed, too. Orson knew the *Kestrel* boasted no sheets other than those of his own bed, and only enough of those to supply a change while Nancy washed the soiled ones.

But the skipper made no noise. He closely scrutinized this first scurvy patient, willing that Nancy should have her way if only she prevented the spread of the dread disease. The old man's eyes were sunken; his tough old skin had turned dusky. There was a strongly fetid odor on his

breath, and a trickle of blood was at the nostrils. Orson turned away looking worried; for he recognized symptoms which ordinarily appeared only in advanced cases. At the door of his own room he paused, his hand not yet upon the handle; for he heard an unusual sound within; the sound of singing. Nancy was singing.

He opened the door quickly, and stared at the girl as if she had been dumb and now spoke for the first time. Poor Nancy stopped singing as the door opened, and she met Orson's stare with a frightened blush.

"Sing up," he laughed. "What're you stopping for?"

But Nancy had no more song in her. She was confused at being caught singing; she busied herself with the work she was doing, while Orson sat on the settee and tried to kick off his sea-boots. Nancy was making a nightshirt for the sick man out of several pieces of soft material she had found among Orson's varied store; relics of past lights o' love. He saw the stuff, and grinned not very pleasantly. His boots were tight. Long hours in them had swollen his feet.

"Get down here and haul these boots off, girl," he said sharply. Nancy laid down her work and knelt before him, struggling with the wet, cold, clinging boots while he regarded her bowed figure somberly.

"Why don't you sing?" he demanded. She al-

most fell over, what with the lurching of the ship and the sudden giving of the first boot.

"I can't sing, Val, I can't really," she replied, bending over the second boot.

"You were making a pretty good stagger at it when I came in. Happy, wasn't you?"

"I was—I—" Nancy stammered. Then the second boot came off, and as she stumbled to her feet the words came in a rush: "It was so good of you to bring old Rogers down here and let me care for him. I didn't expect you'd do anything like that, Val."

Orson regarded her steadily, his lips tightly pressed together, his brows puckered. She certainly had been singing, and singing far from badly. And he was not at all sure that she was so crazy about nursing moldy old shellbacks that she would be forced to sing over old Rogers, ill of the scurvy. But he had been almost a stranger to Nancy lately. She might have developed many little traits for all he knew. Maybe she was trying to develop so that she might, when pleasant sailing permitted him once more to spend time with her, entertain and amuse him with something more than her mere presence. The thought made him chuckle.

"So making old Rogers comfortable made you sing, did it?" he jested at her. "Can't sing for me, but you can sing over that old forec'stle rat, and put him to bed in my best shirt, too. Well, well!"

"I didn't know I was singing, honest, Val. I

was just busy. It has been so lonely down here ever since the bad weather kept you on deck all the time. I thought you didn't care for me any more than you did for the crew. When that old man was brought down for me to take care of I knew then that you were not hard, and cruel, but only too worried and anxious to spare time for me."

"Your notions are a mite off the course, Nancy," Orson laughed, stretching himself at full length on the settee. "I want Rogers cured, if he's curable, and I don't want the scurvy to spread. But don't get the notion that I care one good God damn for the sojering rascals for'ard. This ship's going to be driven to a record, if I live; and I need every man I can keep alive to drive her."

Nancy picked up her work again.

"Put that down," he told her gruffly. "Come here beside me, and I'll tell you some bedtime stories before I fall asleep."

Nancy knelt beside the settee, and he put an arm about her shoulders. She nestled there, her head upon his breast, and her breast close against his side. Her face was turned from his, and with his free hand he played with her hair, roughly, heedless of her trembling. The interior of the cabin was drumming with sound. Seas, gale, stress of spars and rigging, all combined to raise a throbbing chorus of sonorous harmony that was music indeed to Orson's ears. He knew exactly when a blast tried the lofty mainroyalmast to the limit. He knew the moment

when the blast diminished, and left the royal still unburst. Once he heard the officer of the watch shout the order to stand by the mainroyal halyards, and almost upset Nancy in the instant when he was about to rush on deck and forbid that the order be carried out. But he settled down to rest after all while the *Kestrel* stormed north like a frightened thing of life, hounded before the frozen seas that leaped white-fanged at her quarters.

And so he slept, falling into a doze in the midst of the most wakeful of all his stories, weary to death after long, bitter vigil. Nancy gently released herself, straightened his pillow, and softly spread a blanket over him. Then she lowered the light, and went out to prepare vinegar and sugar for old Rogers.

When she came back she got hot water from the pantry and began to remove the dressing from the knife wound in Orson's throat. It was almost healed, now, but the man's very activities prevented entire closure, and Nancy still dressed it twice a day, usually while he dozed. He would send her off with a muttered curse if she tried to take off the dressing while he was awake. Now she had not been able to attend to it for almost twenty-four hours, and a little blood had soaked through the absorbent pad. Gently dabbing it with water, she removed it bit by bit; and it stuck, twitching the flesh so that it bled afresh.

Swiftly, from the depths of sleep, his hand

gripped hers. His eyes opened, and the wariness of the hunted beast was in them. Poor Nancy was greatly frightened; but she was more hurt, and even as his eyes opened, her warm lips dabbed a furtive kiss on the wound, and her free hand went impulsively to his head, there to smooth and caress the unruly hair that tumbled about his temples. His eyes flickered, and slowly closed again in sleep, while his deep chest heaved once in a quivering breath. The hand with which he had gripped hers retained its grip; but it relaxed some of the fierceness; when he slept it had become nothing more than a confiding grasp.

While the ship reeled and thundered through the steep cold seas that make the great southern ocean a region of dread, with cursing men keeping her afloat by dint of sheer pumping, with mates converted to the mad driving of the master they still believed to be a little insane, Val Orson slept the heavy slumber of the physically exhausted; and Nancy crouched on the floor beside him, held by his hand, her own drowsy head once more fallen upon his breast, in slumber almost as deep as his.

And a trickle of water ran across the floor from beneath the port. The sheathing of the cabin worked with the ship's stress. Every piece of old, old wood groaned and squealed. The trickle of water formed a pool of slop under the carpet. It reached and soaked Nancy's dress. Little driblets of water fell from the beams overhead. Where the

bulkhead joined the deck-head, a long splinter was working out under the terrific squeezing. It fell at last: fell into the sopping pool.

Overhead, out on the deck, the bells tinkled their half hours. The gale roared its moments of punctuation; but no more was there any voice heard ordering men to stand by to take in the mainroyal. The ship reeled, the ship plunged, staggering to the shock of seas, but she carried her canvas as long as it held together; and her master slept.

CHAPTER XX

A SUBJECT IS BROACHED

When he found an hour of leisure, the steward gave some attention to his storerooms. In broaching the last cask of beef he had seen that the stupendous lurching of the ship had tumbled his stores into confusion. He asked the mate for men to stow the goods; and four were sent to help him, among them Groves. From time beyond memory the stowing of sea stores in midocean has been a welcome job to forecastle hands. Nearly always there would be an open box of raisins, or cabin biscuit, or dried apples—something worth while stealing. Sometimes the steward was a decent sort, and winked at the little thieveries. Then the men commonly took reasonable toll. Sometimes there was a crab of a steward, and the robbery was as great as human ingenuity could make it. In the *Kestrel* there was a decent steward, all things considered; but there were no stores worth the stealing. The job was hard. There were so many wide-open spaces in the *Kestrel's* lazaret that barrels, boxes, bags and cans had to be hauled and stowed at one end from all corners, and chocked and wedged off with planking. The planks had to be brought from on deck. The ship flung the men and stores about down in the

dark and clamorous little cubby hole; and they growled. To help them along, the steward gave them grog; rich powerful rum straight from the jug; and Groves assumed the position of leader of the gang. He persuaded them to do a good job, and the steward was well pleased when they finished and left him.

"What y' get, matey?" one man asked another, when all returned to the forecastle. "I got a tin o' somethink. Dunno what."

"I got a lot o' funny stuff. Like a bundle o' moldy pipestems. Wot's it good fer? 'Tain't grub, is it?"

"My good lads! Surely you did not steal from that kind steward?" Groves broke in, edging into the little group and putting an eagle eye upon the loot. "Shocking! I got nothing. Let me see."

The fourth man crowded in. He had got nothing either. Share and share alike was usual. He knew that Groves would see to the division. Groves was examining the tin. He knew what the moldy pipestems were.

"You can chew on that stuff when you're really hungry," he grinned. "Macaroni, it's called. It's food of sorts when it's cooked. Italians use it to whistle for wind when raw. What's in the tin, my lad? No label? Lend me your knife." The can was hacked open. Groves smelled at it, wrinkled his clerical nose and handed it back with an air of condolence.

"Chicory!"

"What th' hell's that?"

"It's called coffee in the crew list; you know the sort of coffee we get? Well, that's it. See what comes of stealing."

"Stow yer gab, y' bloody sooner. You didn't get nothink at all. Hey, Bill, gimme some o' them pipestems. A hell of a ship!"

At that moment two thirds of the crew were in the forecastle. The remainder were pumping. One man was at the helm. Chips and the bosun and the sailmaker headed a gang apiece at the pumping. Two of them rested together. And there was no other work done aboard the flying *Kestrel* while she was driven as Orson drove her, unless something carried away and men were needed to secure or replace it. Groves took mental stock of the men below. Sails was on deck. Norris was at the wheel. Godwin was in the pumping gang. Those three were the only ones in a wonderful scheme that had been cooking in the fertile brain of Groves for many a bitter day. The trouble was, they were three very awkward men to handle, if they did not want to be handled.

No man had dared to bring Norris or Godwin to a face-to-face argument. Without ever having tried to establish themselves as such, they were easily leaders of the men in everything pertaining to seamanship; and in the few moments of challenge, they had stood fast enough so that no open contest had

ever materialized. Groves knew ways and means of handling such men when the time came; but they were better out of the way until then. Sails was an older man. But he was one of the fine old sea-dogs bred in the racing clippers of stuns'ls, ringtails, and moons'ls. He was sixty years old, but worth three men yet in any emergency calling for courage and man power. That is, once the shore fog was out of his brain. He would never have been in the *Kestrel* had he been as good a man ashore as he was at sea.

Groves went to his bunk, thumping Tredway in the ribs on the way.

"Get up, and stand by," he said.

Then he unrolled the heavy clothing he had worn while aft with the steward, which he had thrown into his bunk on coming below. From the folds he dragged a gallon jar of rum. Down in the lazaret, the steward kept his drawn stores like that. A full jug and one in use, taken from the main store in the cask which only he and the skipper had the key to.

Groves filled his own hookpot with rum, swallowed a good full ration himself, and called Tredway.

"Swig on this, little man, and if your tongue must wag let it not wag concerning the source of good things," he said, sticking the hookpot under Tredway's nose.

Tredway swigged, his eyes popping and his gullet

surging. When the tears left his eyes he whispered huskily:

"Wot's the 'ookum? Goin' to start somefing?"

"Come into the circle," said Groves.

In the circle, where two men still cursed the captain and steward of a ship the stores of which produced to thieves no better than moldy pipestems and coffee-wood-dust, Groves suddenly thrust his rum, and faces brightened. Men who had never bothered to leave their bunks at the chance of sharing in some lazaret loot, sniffed the aroma of rum, and stuck legs and arms out of bunks.

"Where d'ye get it, parson?" Tredway wanted to know.

"Hell, who cares?" growled a sleeper, waking up and snatching the pannikin.

Groves was full of subtlety. He wanted somebody else to be the goat if things failed to break as he desired. Tredway's long tongue was always ready to wag; given the inspiration of a couple of big shots of rum, the little sea-lawyer could be depended upon to say plenty.

"Drink hearty, little man," urged Groves, shoving the hookpot at Tredway again. The grog went around. Soon it would be time to relieve the pumping gang. Groves wanted something started.

"Don't sip it, drink like a man," he urged, and Tredway took a long swallow, and stuttered, his eyes streaming, and his throat almost withered.

"Yer damn right I'm a man! 'Oo sez I ain't!

Bli'me, if you blokes was half the men I and Groves is, that bleedin' rotter aft wouldn't be bullydamning us at this minit. Men!"

"That's you, Tredway. That's the stuff to give 'em. Have a drink," Groves murmured sympathetically. And the little gutter-snipe Cockney emptied the mug, waved it, and embarked fairly on a torrent of hate. He told the men all they already knew, all he believed they ought to know, all he felt he knew himself, which was far more than all the rest combined.

"An' you sit like figger'eads, lettin' 'im starve us, an' freeze us, an' drive us like bleedin' mokes, while there's grub an' clo'es, an' fire, an' grog aft there—"

"Good fer you, mate," a willing listener broke in. "Let's have a swig o' that rum now, parson. Tredway's right. C'm on, give's a swig."

"Go easy, lads. There are men outside who need warming. Touch the pot lightly, and it'll go around." Groves filled the pannikin again, drinking first, then seeing that Tredway got a good ration before it went around.

"An' that Judy," Tredway went on, coughing. "I got me eye on Nancy, I 'ave. I knows how to treat a smart Judy like 'er. You blokes 'elp yerselves when Orson's downed, and leave the gal to me."

"I'll take care of Nancy," Groves cut in with a knowing laugh. "I've never collected the kiss I should have got when I married her. Carry on, Tredway. You were saying—"

"You're both too smart about the gal," growled the sailor who never said much. "If anything comes of this boozy palaver, it'll be share and share alike, and that means the Judy too."

Some fierce flurry of icy wind carried forward the ting-tang of the bell; and right on the heels of it Godwin appeared in the doorway.

"Rise and shine, me sons. Pump or perish. Shake a leg and relieve better men."

He was covered in ice from the top of his sou'wester to the toes of his sea-boots, and as he paused a moment in the doorway he flogged his hands to warm them. His eyes could not at once penetrate the forecastle gloom; but he sniffed, curiously; and Tredway kept on chattering. Godwin grinned.

"Whose birthday? Where do I come in?"

"Shut yer mouth!" squealed Tredway. "You don't come in nowhere, you and yer bleedin' pal wot was goin' to see 'ow tough—"

"Hush, little man. It's my birthday, not yours. Have a swig, Godwin," Groves interrupted. There was no good in antagonizing Godwin. Some of the hands were getting noisy. It was not yet time to tell them to refuse to pump. "I want to stay below for a few minutes after the watch is changed, Godwin, to give your gang a snort of rum. You don't mind carrying on for me, hey?"

"Make it snappy then," grumbled Godwin. No man wanted to get an overdose of that misery at

the pumps; but Groves' grog still reeked in his nose, and he couldn't refuse. "Give you ten minutes for another swig at that hookpot."

Godwin swigged, and stared with wonder at the men staggering into their oilskins and boots on the reeling deck. All talked. Some sang. They cursed, too, far more bitterly and boldly than ever before on the voyage.

"Won't take the mate long to smell a rat there," Godwin said, wiping his lips with a briny hand. "Where'd they get it?"

"Never mind that now," Groves said, a bit anxious now that the gang were tumbling out on deck, still vociferously talking or singing. Tredway's thin, vehement voice might have been heard clear aft in the Old Man's stateroom.

"Go with them, Godwin, there's a good fellow. Make 'em start a chantey if they must sing. The mate won't kick at that."

Godwin led the gang out; the relieved gang came into the forecastle. Groves met them with a brimming hooker of blood-warming liquor that surprised them, while the men who would go out for the next spell at the pumps talked loudly and liquorishly, eying Groves in hope of getting more. But Groves meant to make the most of his loot. He ministered to the frozen gang just in from the deck, and only talked disconnectedly about Tredway's notions meanwhile.

"That's what Tredway said, isn't it, mates?" He

watched Norris closely. Norris was swigging long and luxuriously at the hookpot. "Tredway can't see why a big crowd of good men, like this crowd, stands for Orson's driving and bedevilling, when here's a smart fast ship that'll fetch good money anywhere along the South American coast. Starving here, and freezing while Orson lives aft along with that pretty Judy and laughs at us—"

"You got a hell of a hope, you have," said Norris, giving back the hookpot. The rest of the men who had heard Tredway raised an uproar against Norris; the newly relieved gang swiftly leaped in, taking sides. Groves stowed away his jug, scrambled into his outer clothing, and went out to take his place at the pump wheel, smiling reflectively. Godwin grinned at him.

"I got 'em singing all right," Godwin said.

Aft Mr. Ringlin listened in a dull sort of surprise to the howling of a pumping chantey. That was the last thing he expected to hear from that crowd in that bitter weather. Godwin and Norris, of all that gang, might have ventured to help out inevitable labor with a song. But this was Tredway singing the solo, and in a voice full of amazing vigor.

"Only one more day, my Johnny—"

And there was more than mere chorusing in the yelp of the rest. There was spirit.

"One more, day!
Oh come rock and roll me over!
One, more, day!"

Mr. Martin came back on deck, unbelieving. Ringlin grinned.

"Don't you hear that old man bawling?
One, more, day!
Oh come rock and roll me over!
One, more, day."

"They'll stand watching!" grunted Mr. Martin.

"Hell, let 'em sing. A singin' sailor's a safe sailor," Ringlin retorted.

"Don't you hear them gals a-calling?
One, more, day!
Oh come rock and roll me over,
One, more, day."

"There's more than singing in that," Mr. Martin declared; then before he could say more Orson came on deck, his eyes holding at first a cold, cruel glitter, which soon turned into a gleam of almost amusement.

"That's where it went, hey?" he remarked coolly, and turned to look at the helmsman. That ill-clad sailorman sweat at the wheel. The storming clipper demanded all his attention. Overpressed as she

was, it was only by closest watching she could be prevented from broaching when her leebow was buried deeper than usual. And the green following seas roared perilously near to the stern fairleads. Any crest that got a good start and met no ice on its way was more than likely to rise just that much higher and crash aboard the poop. It was no time for indifferent steering. It was no time to trust any but proven men. The two mates glanced at each other inquiringly; they had to wait for Orson himself to tell them what he meant by the remark he uttered on stepping out of the companionway.

"The steward missed a full jug of rum after those swine finished in the lazaret. They were given rum, too," Orson said. His eyes hardened again as he sought out certain of the men at the pumps. Then he astonished the mates again.

"Take the helm, Mister Martin, and you'll stand trick and trick with him, Ringlin. I'll keep the deck until they stop singing and get cool again." And when the helmsman shambled past, looking bewildered at being relieved by the chief mate without one word of censure, Orson halted him and spoke to him too:

"Here, you! Go for'ard and tell those men I just gave the steward orders to issue grog twice a day. They stole it, so they can drink it up while they've got it. They'll get no more when that's gone. And if they don't like it, they can bloody well lump it. Let 'em come aft and see me."

The sailor trotted along, to tell his mates a strange yarn of the mad skipper, so softened that he meant to take no fierce vengeance upon the men who stole his rum.

The singing at the pumps lacked vigor long before the spell was done. The relieving gang did not sing. The men who stumbled along to the galley next mealtime cast queer glances at the figures on the poop, as if fearful that some designs upon their food were meditated. But Orson had no eye for anything except the way of his flying *Kestrel*.

Aft, three apparently emotionless men kept watch on deck. In the big stateroom below a softly singing girl sat wedged in a corner with pillows and stitched until her eyes could no longer see.

PART IV

CHAPTER XXI

ORSON'S LUCK

Two mates who had long ago accepted the lordship of Val Orson, stood trick and trick at the helm while the *Kestrel's* master, apparently as invulnerable as ever to fatigue, kept watch without a break for rest through full thirty-six hours. Ice thickened the ship's bows until she carried a bow wave like a scow every time she dipped her figurehead. Added weight added to her burden. Overpressed aloft, she staggered forward with not a man to say she could not bear the load. Four hours after Orson sent the last able seaman away from the wheel, the gang at the pumping quit, in answer to a hail from somebody forward, and there was no relieving gang. Orson grinned coldly then, keeping in his memory the identity of that hailing voice.

He took a heavy revolver from his pilot coat pocket, twirling the cylinder as if estimating its efficiency. Then he suddenly called down the companionway to the steward to bring up a small-caliber high-power rifle he kept in his room. With his head inside the stairway, he was just a bit astonished to hear laughter, Nancy's laughter, and the steward's voice. The steward's voice ceased, as if cut off. Nancy's laugh was hushed too. Then the

steward answered Orson's call and quickly appeared with the rifle.

"What's all the jollification about down there?" Orson demanded surlily. Nancy rarely laughed aloud like that for him. The steward looked frightened, and gulped. He knew Orson's moods by now.

"It was old Rogers, sir. Nancy—I mean Mrs. Orson, just made him take his vinegar, sir. I think he must be getting well."

"Maybe you'll get scurvy yourself, then see how damned funny it is. See that you prepare all the food for the cabin without having to go to the galley. If you lack anything, get it right now."

The steward went below and asked Mr. Martin if anything had happened to the cook. The mate bade him obey orders and leave other people's troubles to take care of themselves. Half an hour later the sharp crack of a rifle echoed through the cabins above all the racket of the charging ship, and Mr. Martin ran on deck, hastily pulling on his watch coat, jamming his hand midway in a sleeve because he tried to don the coat while holding an old bulldog pistol. Ringlin stood like a graven image at the helm, rimed with hoar frost.

Orson stood by the mizzenmast, and his rifle muzzle rested on the rail. To him Mr. Martin went, sure that the crew had at last broken bounds. Martin knew they'd do that. He could have told Orson that letting them get away with that jug

of rum would prove to be the critical point. Orson gave no sign that he knew the mate was there beside him. Martin glanced forward. A man stood at the galley door, cursing the skipper, holding in his left hand a right hand that dripped blood. Coming aft from the forecastle were two more men, Tredway and Groves, and the little sea-lawyer was saying many things.

"The lor sez—" he squealed. Much that he said was lost through his fury. But some was clear enough. "We signed on for lawful rations. You shot that pore bloke just becos he arsked fer our rightful food. You'll see, soon's we get ashore—"

Orson slowly raised the rifle until it covered Tredway.

"Those that work can eat," the skipper announced curtly. Tredway dodged behind Groves, his sputtering vituperation halted by the menace of the rifle. Groves, very drunk, waved one hand and addressed the poop generally.

"Men cannot work like horses and eat like mice, captain. I advise you to—"

Orson fired. The small, vicious bullet cracked through Groves' sou'wester crown, and the man jumped, turning white. Tredway ran like the little rat he was, and Groves dodged clear of another possible shot. The man who had first received a shot slunk forward as fast as he could.

"Men who behave like rats will work like horses and eat as I tell 'em in this ship," Orson promised,

his voice rolling clear and incisive along the decks to where a little group of men hung about the forecastle doors loudly arguing.

Godwin and Norris had the floor. They seemed to be urging the rest to follow them aft. Until they won some response, it was impossible to know just how far aft they meant to go. Groves remained out of range, but his voice could be heard above the roar and thunder of sea and gale and cracking gear, asking what sort of men would let a shipmate get shot at and never make a move.

"Let Ringlin and me go down and put some life into them sir," growled Martin. Orson curtly bade him be still. Godwin started aft. Norris followed. Then Sails, and two more men. Until they reached the main pumps Orson stood tense as if frozen, his finger on the trigger. But there was no attack. The men stopped at the pumps, and stolidly began to grind away at the dreary task of catching up on the water that had been allowed to gain.

"One of you men send the cook to me," Orson ordered then. And when the doctor arrived, looking as if he too had shared in the stolen rum, he was briefly told to serve no food to any man who had not first put in a spell at the pumps. To make sure he would obey, Orson ordered the steward to issue only rations enough for those men now pumping.

"If I refuse them men food, then try to go for'ard

to my bunk, they'll corpse me, cap'n," the doctor grumbled.

"Sleep in your galley, and lock yourself in. If you do give 'em food, except as I order, I'll corpse you myself. Write your own certificate."

The men at the pumps did their two hours' spell, and went to the galley for their meat and biscuit. There was no relieving gang. The water would simply gain until the pumps were manned again. Norris went to the poop ladder.

"Captain, some of us are doing our duty, as we signed to do. It isn't fair to make us do the pumping for all hands, not meaning to speak disrespectful," he said.

"I'm not missing anything, my lad," Orson returned. "Tell Chips to sound the well and bring me the sounding."

Norris returned to his mates, grumbling. Godwin found heart to grin. Every day since they joined the ship they had found some new phase to Orson's complex character. They expected to see Val Orson come storming along when his crew refused duty, to clean the whole bunch neck and crop out single-handed. Chips stood in his half-open doorway, chalking his jointed rod, cursing his delinquent gang who ought then to be at the pumps. Alone, neither Chips nor the bosun could do anything; and neither of them could persuade another man to turn out. Standing there, the carpenter could hear the men's angry voices arguing the point.

There were Tredway and Groves, and the man who had been shot in the hand; and a medley of others, all seemingly in some hot dispute. Then a man came out and told Chips he was ready to go to work. Chips growled back, and went along to the midship sounding pipe, the man following. And when the sounding was taken aft, the sailor hung to Chips still.

"Water's gaining over the best the pumps can do, sir," Chips reported. "Take some sail off her and maybe—"

"She'll carry sail until it blows off," snapped Orson. "Tell the men if they won't pump they'll not only not eat, but I'll sail the ship under and drown 'em in their holes like the rats they are."

"I'm ready to work, cap'n. I never quit. They wouldn't let me out," the solitary sailor said.

"Join the gang that will work, then," was the retort.

The men sulked forward. The wind whipped seas aboard, until the entire ship forward of the waist was a cold, bitter, dripping thing of horror to hungry men. And as the rum died in them hunger became a real thing. Godwin and Norris argued long and stubbornly. They manhandled a man or two before they got through; and others who had gone to work with them last spell bragged about the effect of a full belly on a cold but willing sailorman. Still Tredway counseled fight. Groves had cunningly kept back a little rum, sufficient to stiffen

his own courage and keep the little sea-lawyer's tongue well greased. It was time for the working gang to go back to the pumps again, and old Sails was stepping out, when with a crack and a roar the mainroyal burst at last, and the ship vibrated to the uttermost fastening under the terrific threshing.

"Get that sail secured!" roared Orson, the emergency making him forget that he had for the time being no crew. The mate was about to relieve Ringlin at the helm; he too leaped forward, bawling orders. At the foot of the mainmast Martin realized the extent of the trouble. He turned and roared aft:

"The yard's snapped, sir! Lose the mast in a minute!"

Regardless of the men, and how they might receive him, Mr. Martin plunged right into the forecastle, bursting through the little gang around Sails and bellowed.

"Now, m' sons! There's a fine job for half a dozen sailors! Come on you, and you—" The mate grabbed man after man, and the rest could only stare. Out on deck Norris and half of the pumping gang were at the main rigging to windward. Godwin and Sails were at the pumps, undecided. At them Mr. Martin yelled:

"You men carry on pumping unless you want the ship to go from under you! Come on, you brave lads!" Again he had to grab men one by one, for

the malingerers he had bustled from the forecastle were already inclined to return.

"Yuh wooden men! What's th' use o' wreckin' th' bloody ship out o' spite? Ain't yuh goin' with her if she goes?" shrieked Chips, and the man who had followed him aft added his bit above the stupendous din of the threshing sail and battering royalyard.

"Knock that parson and 'is lawyer over the 'ead, and turn to! They're wise, they are. Kiddin' you to get drowned as well as starved to death!"

Men seemed to drift from nowhere. Only the voices of Groves and Tredway in the forecastle might be heard still wordily holding forth. The royalyard had snapped, as the mate guessed, and one yardarm flogged hellishly aloft there, only held by the earring of the sail, the lift, and the brace, with a wide sphere of evil influence at the command of its giddily gyrating flail. The other part, still held to the slender royal mast by the parral, jerked violently to the threshing of the broken end; and the parting of robands could be heard from the deck as they tore out one by one between eyelets and jackstay.

When the halyards were let go, and that part of the yard which was partly retained by the parral was secured by clewing down, the mate led unwilling men aloft to muzzle the fighting fiend up there in the freezing gale. Even Orson did not roar an order to mend and set the sail again. He did not

bellow to Chips to start fitting a new royal yard.

After two hours of terrific endurance aloft, the men came down, and Mr. Martin helped aft a man whose knee was crushed to a red pulp, other men followed, sure that their obedience in emergency must receive reward.

"Tell the steward to bring me a glass of rum," Orson told the mate after a glance at the wounded knee. Men crowded the poop ladder hopefully; yet that one glass of rum was not going far. It was brought, and the steward remained, shivering in the biting cold. Orson slowly poured the strong spirit over the crushed flesh, holding the ankle meanwhile in an iron grip.

"Wrap it up," he told the steward briefly, and the sailor was helped by the steward into the warmth and glow of the cabin.

"That'll do. You can lay for'ard," Orson snapped at the waiting men. Then one of them stepped out.

"Captain," he stuttered, blue with cold, and shaking with exhaustion, "we done our job, on em'ty stummicks, sir. Wuzn't easy, neither. Mister Martin knows that. Respeckfully, sir, we asks our rations."

"Rations are issued for men who work the ship. You'll get your whacks, all hands, when all hands keep the pumps manned. I don't care a whoop what you choose to do aloft to keep yourselves warm. That'll do, men. Lay for'ard."

Dumbly the men obeyed. And dumbly the mates watched. The ship rode into icy seas, and her skipper might have been one of her icicles. But when the pumping spell was done, and another one-third of the crew were due on deck, that new gang appeared, sullen and muttering, but they took up the pumping and kept it going, damning the soul of Orson, perhaps, promising him reprisal and themselves vengeance; but carrying on with the job because one man, all alone in a world of bitterness, was able to be a bit more bitter than they.

And so with the next gang, and those after. Orson did condescend to unbend once. He curtly told the second mate to fetch aft six men, and named them, each to receive one hooker of rum, to be drunk on the poop; and four of those six men were to do all the steering thenceforth. No other man was to be permitted to touch the wheel. But, that order carried out, and one of the men at the helm, with the proper officer keeping the deck, Val Orson went straight to the chartroom. He might have been excused had he gone to his bed. But no. He called for the log reading, then went to his chart, his books, his log book, and spent an hour tracing the track of the *Kestrel* up to the minute; then compared the result with those old, old records he almost treated as gods.

The six men treated to rum went forward, or all but that one now at the wheel, to tell disgruntled men what was to be gained by loyalty, what to be

lost by listening to such mentors as Tredway and Groves. They did not receive unanimous applause; there were Tredway, Groves, the wounded man, and one or two more, who kept trouble a-bubbling. But, mostly, men who were hungry were more receptive to argument promising food than to that which promised only revenge.

The mates, keeping their watches, talked briefly when relieving each other. They had tasted the rigors of keeping a wheel during all their time on deck. They had seen the ship forced beyond her endurance. They had seen men weaken and fail. More, they had seen a promising mutiny nipped in the bud by such methods as they had never hoped to see Val Orson put into use. Through it all, and now to a vaster degree, Orson kept right on comparing his ship's run with the best of other ships of palmier days of sail. Four hours after he might have retired to his bed and Nancy, Val Orson finished a long calculation and stepped out on deck. He raised his head, sniffed the air, and announced shortly to both mates, then in act of relieving each other:

"By dead reckoning, the ship is not far behind where she ought to be. The sky's going to clear. Call me as soon as a star comes through."

He went below. Ringlin watched him go, then shrugged his husky young shoulders.

"Still thinking he can beat records! He's darned

lucky he's got a man willing to pull a rope, or an officer willing to stand by him."

Mr. Martin shrugged too.

"Man, he'll break a record if ever man can do it. Lucky? Sure he's lucky. It's Orson's luck, my son, Orson's luck."

CHAPTER XXII

BLUER SKIES

Old Rogers was not getting well. He died on the very day that the bitter cold turned to milder airs; the day when for the first time in a month the seas ran with a sibilant whisper instead of a venomous hiss. Seas were still green-gray. Skies had not yet that warmth of blue so impatiently watched for. Winds still blew hard and true from the south pole; but the sun rose higher each noon, snow was no longer a savage thing to curse, but a softly falling, fading thing like the wraith of a repentant, gentle sinner. Old Rogers died on a day which broke bright and almost blue. Nancy's eyes were mistily sad as she told Orson.

"I did my best, Val, truly I did," she said. And, as if some devil within the man were ever goading him to appear brutal before Nancy, Orson retorted:

"I've heard of nurses in hospitals having a good time with young sawbones while patients died next door. I suppose you and that damned steward were playing hospital, hey? Tell the mate to have Chips sew the old stiff up and make ready to give him a passage."

And while old Rogers' funeral was being got ready, Orson had the two injured men in the fore-

castle brought aft, and put into the cabin old Rogers had occupied. The man with the crushed knee was lifted into the bunk where Rogers died before the last impress of the old sailor's body was out of the mattress.

Men who had been ready to kill Orson a few days before now argued hotly in his favor.

"Ain't he treatin' them fellers right?"

"Did y' ever see Jack Mucks took aft for nursin' in a windbag afore?"

Thus went the chatter. Groves, having received orders to read the service over old Rogers, believed that he had been forgiven; that rum was to be his reward again. He added his word:

"After all, men, we signed on to do our duty. The captain was right to punish disobedience. He is not a bad man."

"Yus, y' bleedin' welcher!" Tredway howled. "'Oo wos it as started disobedience? 'Oo stole the rum wot put thoughts into men's 'eads?"

"Hush, little man," Groves said soothingly. "Who knows but there may be rum again? Spare your breath, laddie, spare your breath."

There was a change in the erstwhile preacher when he came in after the funeral. With careful attention to detail he had made an attempt to impress Orson with his utter willingness to let bygones be bygones. He read, or recited, the short portion of the burial service he could remember, with much unction, glancing often sideways at Nancy standing

at the poop rail, casting an occasional eye at Orson when rolling out his most impressive numbers. And when it was all over, and there should have been rum, there was no rum.

"Tredway, you were right. Orson's a swine. I must have been crazy to ever think he was a man." Groves railed savagely while ripping off his imitation clerical garb.

"Hell, yer both crazy!" growled the sailor who rarely said much. "Get out and take a snifter o' good fresh air, then you won't feel so bad." The blue in the sky was at work in unsuspected breasts.

Other men were discussing Val Orson. Godwin and Norris, the good friends of many a voyage together, found it impossible to agree in this case.

"What's Orson ever shown us, barrin' bluff?" Norris wanted to be told.

"Did he bluff the Greek?" Godwin returned. "Didn't he handle all hands without fuss when they refused to pump?"

"He had the Greek's number. That was easy. But don't you get the notion it was Orson who made the men turn to. Hunger and accident that was, and his blasted gun." Norris was unconvinced. Godwin laughed.

"Well, I'm satisfied. Orson isn't quite the manhandling bucko I expected, but he gets results, and when it's necessary to crack a man in two he does it without any mistake. Besides, he's got some good in him. Look how he took care of Rogers 'til

the old josser slipped his cable. And how about taking Tom and Ike aft? Makes no difference that one got shot for sassing him and the other got hurt doin' his job sailor fashion. They're hurt, and need care, so aft he takes 'em and let's Nancy give it to 'em."

"You're as crazy as Tredway!" growled Norris surlily. "I was aft on the logline when he broached that question. He had old Rogers aft because he wanted all hands able to sweat their guts out on his God damned old hooker, and scurvy spreads. And he told the mate his woman was too blasted happy, and the steward was too well fed and lazy; to fetch aft them two men so's there'd be work for the steward and the woman. Care? Val Orson wouldn't care a squirt in hell if all hands were dyin' o' plague, so long as his rotten old ship was flying. The cold had got to Ike's shot hand and Tom's mashed knee. If he'd left 'em for'ard they'd damn soon have croaked, and while they were croaking another bloke 'ud have to look after 'em. Orson's a cold-blooded lump o' hellish tripe, and I'm goin' to brace him sharp up one day."

"It'll have to be soon," grinned Godwin. "Now the weather's broke, all hands don't feel so sour. And the old hooker's making time, too."

"Don't you make any mistake," Norris retorted. "He's a long way from busting records up to now. What's got into you, anyhow? First off you were so darned eager to bust him in the kisser just be-

cause of that soft-heady floosey. Now look at you!"

Godwin grinned again. He turned Norris around, facing aft. Nancy was on the poop, bareheaded to the brisk wind, her hair all wild and her face alight. Orson paced the deck to windward, and gave no look to Nancy, but there was no mistaking Nancy's look.

"There's the reason," Godwin said. "If that girl isn't well content, I'm a salt herring. What damned fool 'ud try to horn in there?"

There was a lot of truth in Godwin's notion. Nancy just then glowed with sober contentment. After the weeks of grim storm just passed, with the inevitable darkness of human spirit matching the bitter weather, she felt much like a bird suddenly released into sunshine after imprisonment in a dark, cold cage.

Old Rogers had not been a pleasant patient toward the last. Scurvy patients cannot be pleasant. And Rogers was very old, and very helpless. The two new patients were far less trying. There was little the matter with them in a bodily way except their wounds, and they were much more terrible to look at than they were actually. After the first cleansing with creso, and bandaging, Nancy didn't mind looking at the wounds at all. She was glad to have them aft. Orson had little time for her lately, and days were so long and lonely without something to do. She had finished her sewing, and the improvised hospital gave her a hobby. More than that,

it gave her one more peg on which to hang her rather pitiful faith in Orson's humanity.

She wanted to believe that his harshness, his brutality, were a pose. His hardness toward her was always more displayed verbally, or even negatively, than physically. He had rarely hurt her, except in the way of rough caress, which she had grown rather to long for even while cringing from the sting. His words sometimes hurt her cruelly; particularly when he enlarged upon some bygone light o' love's especial trick of love-making, perhaps forcing her to look upon the light o' love's picture the while.

But now she felt sure he was her man, that she had won him from all lights o' love forevermore. And feeling that way toward him, it gave her a warm little thrill to think that he, Val Orson the man-killer, the abductor of women, who laughed when they stabbed him, ridiculed their threats of self-destruction and made them love him in the end; he was the same man who could shoot a sailor coldly, without rage, and put that sailor into the comfort of the cabin and let her be nurse to him; making no distinction between that man and the other who had been hurt while doing his duty.

She hugged herself as she stood there, taking the first fresh airing she had been able to have for a long time. True, he took no more notice of her than if she had been a bollard or a timber-head.

He was much too engrossed in watching the ship, and the weather signs.

Chips was mending the broken yard. There were no more spare in the ship. The yard was being fished; spliced by putting the jagged ends together, mortising twelve-foot pieces of strong pine into both parts all around the circumference, and tightly serving the splice with wire rope after the whole had been fastened with inset spikes and the holes dowelled. Sails was mending the split royal. Bosun and two hands spliced and served anew the broken or spread ends of braces, lifts, and sheets ready to fit. Watching it all Orson seemed nervous, yet pleased. Straight from the south'ard came the wind, and it sang as lustily as it once roared. It gave the *Kestrel* just that slant which brought her yards clear of the backstays, stretched every yard of canvas to cracking point, and made every 'tween-mast staysail pull like a dragoon. The blue overhead was just made bluer by scudding tufts of white cloud. The sea that leaped and thundered before the flying clipper was rapidly taking on the deeper green which soon would turn to blue.

The *Kestrel* labored less, yet sailed as fast, lacking the opposition of the grimmer, heavier seas. Men worked at the pumps, but their labor was growing lighter, too, as the ship's grew lighter.

The *Kestrel* was still flying at that record which filled her master's brain sleeping and waking. And the aim was not beyond her power of flight.

Nancy went below, and set to work making a supper such as had not been eaten in the saloon for many days. She wanted to see the long table dressed again. The steward had told her how real the provision shortage was; and she had puzzled her head for ways of eking out things to make a showing as well as to fill a need. And there were little flowers of silken scraps and wire which she had made. If the ship would only stay still long enough for a meal to be eaten, she could make the table look pretty. But the ship would not keep still. That silent, grim figure above saw to it that she could not. Yet she so wanted to make a display this evening. It seemed as if her mood and that of the reviving weather were utterly in sympathy.

"What can you suggest for supper?" she asked the steward. They had just finished attending to the hospital inmates. The steward shrugged and grinned.

"Hash and dried-apple stew, I s'pose," he replied. She shrugged. It was so obviously the only possible reply. But she would rise above it. There was flour in the ship. A bit moldy, sour, crawling with weevils, but capable, when dried over a spirit stove so that the weevils vacated it for cooler quarters and the sourness was modified with the damp, of being converted into pastry of sorts.

"Open a tin of lard," she said, "and bring up a sifter of flour."

"It's the only tin o' lard left, I told you."

"Never mind. I want it. This evening of all evenings I'll cut a dash. Dry the flour. Then get out a table-cloth. I'm going to set the table for a party."

"Damned if the whole ship ain't gone mad!" the steward muttered, but grinned, too, as he dropped through the lazaret hatch.

Nancy made a paste of flour and water with lard and salt. Of the hash she made savory pasties. Of the dried apples a big pie. She set the table, and the steward fixed the fiddles, tying to four of the center intersections of the mahogany racks glass flower vases long in disuse. While supper was cooking in the pantry, Nancy sat on the floor of her room, hurriedly making up posies of her artificial flowers, and singing happily, unconsciously, loudly.

"Now what in hell's started you off again?"

She started, turned, half rose, scattering the floor with flowers, her singing stopped, her face all rosy and shy, to see Orson staring alternately at the saloon table with a sort of whimsical contempt, and at her with very honest astonishment.

CHAPTER XXIII

NANCY'S HAPPINESS

THAT supper was a mixture of success and failure. Every eye that fell upon the prettily set table lighted up for a moment with long-dormant interest in the nicer things of life. Orson ate two pieces of pie, and made no other comment; but that was sufficient for Nancy. If he only would not have stared at her so queerly. She grew uncomfortable. All the brightness faded from her face, and a wistfulness settled there. She sat through the meal while one mate relieved the other, serving all from her own proper place at the table foot, and trying to be bright. But Orson's gaze never left her face; and when the meal was over, and Nancy went to her room, Orson followed her, and shut the door behind him.

"Did you like the supper, Val?" she asked timidly eager.

He gripped her arm, pulling her before him with a fierce twist, and as her eyes met his squarely she shivered.

"Why—what— You're hurting me, Val," she stammered.

"I'm likely to hurt you so you'll know it," he laughed unpleasantly. "Tell me what's all the cele-

bration about. Come on. What's it all about?"

"What do you mean? The table laid again? I try to make the place cheerful as well as I can. I can't do very much, but—"

Orson was looking down at her much as he once looked at the men along his rifle. His lips curled, and he tightened his grip on her arm, her eyes darkening with fear and bewilderment.

"Don't try to fool me! A couple o' times lately I caught you singing when God knows there was damned little to sing about. You ain't singing for me, girl. You stop as soon as I get within hearing. And you were laughing and skylarking with the steward a while ago—"

"Oh, Val! Do you know what you're saying?" Nancy cried vehemently, even her simple soul wise enough to follow his meaning. "I sing when I'm alone, because I'm happy. I don't often laugh, Val. You stay away from me too much."

"And you fill my place with the steward, a damned flunkey?"

"That's not true! It's wicked to say that, when you know it's not true. I'm your woman, and well you made sure of it. What man would want to, if he dared to, flirt with me in your ship? It's wicked, and untrue, and, and— Oh, just silly!" she cried, and all the warm color came surging back into her face. Her eyes, for that one angry moment all alight with indignation, softened until they only glowed shyly up at him.

"You don't laugh much, but you sing when you're alone because you're happy, eh?" he mocked. "But you laugh with the steward and you stop singing when I come nigh you. Well, my lass, just you keep on thinking you're my woman, and don't ever begin to forget it. And you'll sing for me same as for others. You'll laugh for me, too, or by God I'll show you a few tricks that'll make you wish you could laugh. Get out some night gear for me. I'm going to turn in for once."

"I think a sleep will do you good, Val. You've been under a strain. It's made you irritable and unfair." Nancy put out his clean pajamas, punched the pillow, and went out humming softly to look at the two sick sailors. Orson's dark eyes flashed, but he repressed the impulse to answer her, and as he rolled into bed he chuckled to think that she had shown so much spirit. As for Nancy, she stepped a little more proudly, and her face wore a more mature dignity, because Val Orson had shown her unmistakably that he could be jealous. It gave her a sense of importance she had only secretly hoped for until then.

Val Orson was scarcely the man to start something and not finish it. He awoke after a deep sleep in a fresh, clean bed, full of his own tremendous vitality. It was the first time in weeks that he had permitted himself the luxury of real sleep in absolute relaxation. His ship lagged just barely behind the schedule she must maintain in order to

wipe that old record from the books forever. She was sailing as fast as human ingenuity and man power could make her; and as the weather grew milder, though she sailed as fast as before, she leaked less because the seas were less. But she did leak; tremendously; in any other ship the boats would long ago have been overhauled in readiness; but after the bitter experience south of the Horn the leakage seemed trivial to the pump-hardened crew. Orson knew that, if ever he were destined to set up that new record to live for all time, it must be at the expense of incessant vigilance, and it might easily be at the expense of the life of the ship itself; for he scarcely hoped the old *Kestrel* would be much good after the terrific wracking he had put her through.

Thus, only by incessant watching, he might hope to pick up that much mileage day by day as would give him a margin of time in case the winds fell light toward the end and no longer thrust the heavily laden old clipper through the seas as she ought to go. To be free on deck, he must be secure below, and to that end he told the steward a few homely truths which put that not overbold individual into a trembling fit that lasted until Orson had left him some time.

Judging by the tremendous activity that immediately began down in the storeroom, Orson had given the steward work enough to do to keep him out of mischief. As for the steward, about the last

thing on earth he had ever thought of was being unduly familiar with his skipper's woman. But the sourest dose was Nancy's; for she was compelled to hear every word said to the steward, and her ears burned as she went almost blindly about her morning duties.

Nevertheless, when Orson came below for the next meal, and went to his room to wash his hands, he surprised Nancy again, softly singing. She stopped at once, and blushed, but otherwise carried on to finish her job of tidying up the stateroom. Orson said nothing to her; but when he went to take his place at the table he closed the door behind him, then stood, listening. The mate stood by his own chair, waiting for the captain to seat himself, and if any thought other than of ship's business entered the head of decent Ken Martin, there was no sign of it. He did not even look at Orson, standing there, head bent downward, at the closed door of the stateroom he had just left. But Orson was not there long. He heard Nancy take up her song again; and he got to his seat and turned the chair just as she opened the door and came out to her own place. Nothing was said by either.

That was one of the ship's banian days. A banian day at sea is a meatless day. Such had long been the fashion aboard the *Kestrel,* once a week. Commonly, in well found deepwater ships, banian days only came at the fag-end of a long passage. Men expected them, when a passage had been overlong.

But the *Kestrel* was within a few days of having made a record passage to date. The only thing that kept the men from rebelling was the very plain fact that the cabin fared no better, so far as material was concerned; and the thoughtful issue of grog on those days.

The cabin meal consisted of biscuits, made from moldy flour, tinned butter that would soon require to be spread with a brush, thick pea soup, and more dried apples pulped into mash and called sauce. The forecastle had the same materials, but the doctor could never do as well with them as Nancy and the steward did for the cabin.

Since their first attempt to stick up for their rights in the matter of food, however, the men had not complained, since Orson was absolutely honest about the sharing of the stores. He had skimped the stores to pay wages for men enough to drive his ship; and he shared in the shortage when it came.

There was now, or seemed to be, sound of voices on the main deck near to the forward cabin doors, which were under the half spiral poop ladders and had not yet been opened since the bad weather. Access was had to and from the poop by way of the deckhouse companionway. Orson looked up at the sound, and the steward shifted uneasily in his pantry.

"What's the row out there, steward?" Orson wanted to know.

"I don't know, sir," the steward said, unconvincingly.

"Find out!"

The man ran. Orson's eyes followed him out, then Mr. Martin volunteered:

"No doubt it's the rum, sir. No rum to-day."

"Rum? Rum, is it?" Orson almost stuttered with rage. "Didn't the swine steal enough rum to have lasted a week? I'll give 'em rum."

The steward returned, looking frightened. Mr. Ringlin's lusty voice was heard ordering somebody for'ard. Orson glared a question at the steward.

"The rum's all gone, Captain, and the men are growling because there's none for banian day. I have the stores list. Was going to show it to you after dinner. Here it is."

Orson glanced down the pitiful inventory of stores remaining, and for once his brow seemed to wrinkle with concern. He glanced at the table, so sparsely spread; and furtively at Nancy, so bravely uncomplaining. On deck other men could be heard now, howling back at Ringlin.

"Can't you do anything at all with that cask of spoiled beef?" Orson demanded.

"It's very bad, sir. Ought to go overboard. It'd kill rats. I found one in the barrel, dead. Stinks, it do."

"Last barrel of pork broached? Rum all gone? All right! From now on, all banian days except Sunday, understand? I'll go and see what the hands are bawling for."

Mr. Martin got up as soon as Orson left the

table, and went on deck to relieve Ringlin; Orson had picked up his pistol from his desk before going on deck, and Martin followed the good example. At the poop ladders the watch then supposed to be eating dinner had all congregated. Ringlin stopped arguing with them when Orson arrived, and the argument on the men's side noticeably lessened.

"What's the trouble, men? Out with it," snapped Orson in no soft mood.

"We wants our rum, sir, banian day."

"Quite right, men. Right enough," Orson replied, evenly. He eyes were seeking out faces in the little mob. He noticed neither Groves nor Tredway among them. The gang was led by a man who usually did his work faultlessly, and had nothing to say. At the pumps a small gang just kept the wheel turning, and a dribble of water from the lip scarcely wetted their boots. They were obviously marking time, making as little racket with the pump gear as possible, in order to hear the proceedings aft.

"Thank ye, sir, and maybe the stooard—" the sailor proceeded hopefully. Orson held up his hand, and his face was hard and grim.

"Listen to me, you men. There is no rum. There is none in the ship, for me or for you. One of you stole a full jug out of the storeroom, and all hands had a hell of a good time on it while it lasted. Issued by the steward, that would have been a full week's allowance. You'd still be getting rum on banian days. And, wait a minute, my lads, listen

to this: there will be a banian day six days a week now, straight along. Get that? Every day but Sunday a banian day, and no rum. Sundays you'll get a half whack of pork as long as it lasts. Now go for'ard and take it out on the man who stole that rum. Lay for'ard!"

Mr. Martin kept his hand in his pocket, and his fingers on his gun. Ringlin stood behind the skipper, ready to stop a rush with his hands. Orson stood there at the ladder head, cold and sinister, staring down every eye that dared face him. And the men turned. They growled fiercely, they swore, but when they moved it was toward the forecastle, and the names most to be heard on their lips as they went were the names of Groves and Tredway.

CHAPTER XXIV

ALL BANIAN DAYS

How far the men went by way of "taking it out on the man who stole the rum" might be in doubt; but Groves relieved his opposite number at the pump wearing a purple eye, and Tredway spat blood along with his curses as he, too, went to the pumps. The curses were aimed at Groves queerly enough, but the little guttersnipe sea-lawyer took care to edge into a place as far from Groves as possible. And Groves made no answer to his old crony. The once reverend gentleman said nothing to anybody noticeably; but he indulged in the silent speech of the eye, and if a purple eye can be matched by thoughts of the same hue, that was the hue of his thoughts as he glanced often at the various figures from time to time on the poop.

Those were days of quiet. Sometimes a vast quiet covers the sea before a fierce outburst of storm. Yet the men appeared to be far from meditating any further rebellion, mild or fierce, against the master of the *Kestrel.* There seemed little they could hope to do. So far as working the ship was concerned, all hands knew that was inevitable. There was Orson, standing watch night and day when he might have been taking his ease. He watched the ship and her

steering, her trim and the progress of the leak, as if he still had a chance of making a record and establishing his vessel once for all as a big money maker. Everybody knew that a record was very much to be doubted now. The ship slipped a bit behind every day since the winds had softened and the logs in the hold had soaked up so much water. And as for making money afterward, even Orson must know that the day of the wind-jammer was past.

Not enough sailing ships were left for a record passage to make any difference in getting freights. Besides which, if the ancient *Kestrel* ever reached port with her present cargo intact, it was rather more than likely she would never get another charter, for she was wracked almost to pieces now. But whatever his idea might be, Val Orson was bound to set up a new record for his old hooker, and that was all the men need know. He saw to it that they did their part, as he did his. He had paid them wages for just that thing.

And since the sun grew warmer daily, and the breeze remained fair, the first week of all banian days produced nothing more ominous than a deeper run of growling every time the mess-kids went forward. Whenever a man felt like blowing off steam, there were Groves and Tredway to act as human safety valves. When six days of meatless meals seemed just about the limit beyond which the men would not go, along came the seventh day and pork,

with moldy flour duff to satisfy in part the gnawing of hungry bellies and stop loose mouths. Orson knew crews, oh, very well indeed! On the Sunday when the pork went forward, he also sent half a plug of tobacco for each man, without saying a word of stopping the cost from the account of wages. He had seen hard driven crews ready to fall upon their taskmasters when all the tobacco was gone, though as long as there was a smoke or a quid to solace them they would work and endure like heroes. He sent this tobacco out of his own store; and he knew how small that store had become.

Men actually began to defend him: mostly on Sundays.

"Yus, you go arft and kiss him!" Tredway spat out. "Short memories some blokes got."

"Hush, laddie," Groves soothed him. "The ship's a long way from home yet."

"Go sit in the tar!" Tredway told him, with a curse.

But the old cronies were drawing together again. Both were under a cloud forward: both needed fellowship; each found the sort of fellowship most congenial in the other. And after a week or two of living with men, sharing the grind of pumping out an old wooden ship, eating from the same short whack rations, other men who had temporarily forsaken the pair of stormy petrels in anger gradually came back into the fold of common intercourse. That, too, seemed inevitable. No use always cry-

ing over spilt milk; or rum that was stolen and had been drunk. After all, Groves shared that rum out very matey.

A fair fresh gale hopped on to the tail of the *Kestrel* when in mid-south-Atlantic, and hounded her north in a smother of white foam on a sea as blue as the heart of a summer sky. The pumping increased. There was endless pully-hauling on gear that could be stretched no tighter. Always the handy-billy to the halyards and sheets. Yards almost squared, head-sails nearly becalmed, bows driving deep in roaring swells that ran ahead but never eluded the swoop of the soaring *Kestrel*. And Val Orson pacing the poop like the master of a first-chop tea clipper on the last ten leagues of a premium tea race.

"Heave the log, Mister!" That was the hourly order. No matter that the patent taffrail log was ever trailing and recording. Orson knew enough not to trust the patent gadget after months of use at sea, when there was the old, tried, proved ship's log and reel for a man to compare with. And then when the daily run was worked up by most carefully checked "fixes," and compared with the account by log and compass, with what intensity did Val Orson bring up his log to date and place alongside of it that old sailing record he had bound himself to beat.

"Flow the fore-sheets an inch or two, Mister." That was likely to ring in the ears of the mate on

watch. "A fores'l should lift her, not bury her!"

Val Orson, in all his years at sea, had never commanded a first-rate clipper in her prime. He had been mate or second mate perhaps of a ship with a name; but he had always nursed, secretly, an ambition which, with the years going at speed, seemed certain to elude him. When he bought the old *Kestrel,* long past her day, the day of sail was about as far gone as she. At first it had taken all his energy, all his fighting soul, to get a cargo of any sort for his ship, and it had been harder still to get mates and men for that sort of haphazard cargo. But when he drove his ship across the Pacific to learn that he had broken a record of thirty years' standing, ambition had once more sprung to life in his breast, and this flight of the *Kestrel,* which he knew, better than anybody else, was likely to prove the final flight of a bird with broken pinions, was bound to be flown at the peak of endurance for timber, hemp, iron, cotton, human flesh and blood. And, stinting nothing in flesh and blood, Val Orson gave of his own unstintedly.

The splendid progress of the ship reacted on men who had just about been ready to listen to whispers of devious import again.

"You're letting the water gain on the pumps, Mister," Orson snapped one afternoon when his reckoning failed to satisfy him. And young Mr. Ringlin, growing more and more in admiration of the old ship and the cold, grim man driving her,

enthusing now because, whereas before he saw nothing but the callous driving of hopeless men in a hopeless endeavor, he saw now a chance, a real chance, of going home second mate of a record-breaking clipper. Mr. Ringlin sent his lusty young hail along the maindeck and the gang ground the handles around more briskly. They could even raise a song unchallenged:

"Mizzouri she's a mighty river,
A-away yo' rolling river!
Mizzouri she's a mighty river
Ho-ho, we're bound away—
'Cross the wide Mizzouri.

Ho, Shanadore I love your daughter,
A-away yo' rolling river!
For her I've crossed the stormy water
Ho-ho, we're bound away—
'Cross the wide Mizzouri."

All through the bright, breezy days when the ship foamed for her port and the sunlight danced about her, Nancy spent long hours on deck just soaking in warmth and brightness. True, Orson gave her scant attention. There were little circles about her eyes which hinted that she might not be as happy as she bravely tried to appear. But she smiled, and her eyes glowed, and when her man came within her view she seemed to react to his presence in a

manner that ought to have gratified a man who felt interested at all. Once he stumbled, the ship suddenly lurching as he balanced trying to get an observation with his sextant; and Nancy uttered a little cry, half rising from her seat as if to run and catch him. He recovered, seamanlike, never taking the sextant from his eye, and never knew that anybody, much less Nancy, had noticed him stumble or cared either. Only young Ringlin, and the helmsman, had noticed the little incident, and both grinned until one saw the other, then the helmsman's grin changed to intense regard for the course.

One morning the steward brought a report to Orson. That same day the order went forth that banian days would be seven days a week. The pork was finished. There was still a very little old salt hake, which required sharp hunger to sauce it into edibility. That was served to the men on Sunday, instead of the usual half ration of pork. Sunday afternoon there was a sort of mass meeting in the forecastle; and Messrs. Groves and Tredway came suddenly back into favor.

"Stinkin' fish! And a lousy arf portion! D'ye fink they eat this muck aft?" Tredway was in great form. "Ain't they holdin' grub back on us? Mark my words, it's only us blokes as is keepin' th' bleedin' 'ooker afloat wiv pumpin', and he knows it. Them aft is keepin' perwisions enough to grub the boats if she starts to founder, then we'll get left to save

ourselves while him and 'is floosey starts orf in the longboat wiv all the grub."

"Don't speak so of the captain, laddie," Groves chided softly. He watched the faces around him. The forecastle was shot with sunlight, and faces were expressive. Jaws ground away on tobacco; the sunlight was writhing with spirals of smoke; but the atmosphere of the gathering was independent of smoke or sunlight. Coming in from the bright outdoors the clank of the pumps maintained its harsh note against all the softer complaint of straining gear, the clacking of chain sheets, the slow, steady clang of wash ports on either side as the ship rolled down the wind. That harsh clank of pumps had been with them now for many weeks. Full fed and happy, they might have endured even that; but there had been little happiness aboard the *Kestrel*. Full fed they had never been, and starvation perched on the trucks already.

"There can not be food aft, laddie," Groves went on, talking to Tredway as if nobody else was there. "Look at Nancy's eyes next time you're near enough. There's hunger there, and pain. I wish I had shipped with a crew of men who were men. I grieve to see that young girl slowly dying at the whim of a brute. But do not speak ill of your captain, laddie. Not that."

"You go to 'ell!" grumbled Tredway, and rolled into his bunk.

Still days sped by, and still the ship sped north;

but the winds died to mild breezes, to airs, to zephyrs. Once the *Kestrel* gained to a position where another good day's work would put her ahead of the record. That day the salt fish was ended. Orson scarcely noticed the effect on the men, though it was Sunday, and no fish meant simply that the seven banian days a week would be absolute and without the poor amelioration of bad fish.

"I'm keeping my gun on me, Ringlin. Better get yours," the mate said when the deck was relieved. Ringlin silently followed the advice. One glance at Orson warned both officers that, so far as he was concerned, the crew might as well be off the earth; his mind was centered wholly in the ship. Orson kept the deck day and night, only dozing fitfully in the chartroom. His pencil was always jabbing at the chart. Whenever the ship had made ten miles he pricked it off. Nancy brought his food, such as it was, and many an hour did she study how to make the poor rations delectable and attractive to him. While he lay on the settee, or dozed in his chair, she knelt or sat beside him, and her fingers caressed his grizzled hair; she crooned little songs she never dared to sing if she knew he heard.

And then one night, when the ship rolled sickeningly down a path of moonlight, with just wind enough to keep her heavy courses clear of the masts, he suddenly opened his eyes and surprised her in the middle of her song. His eyes fastened upon her face until their sheer force drew her to look at him.

His gaze was fixed and unwinking. His hand held hers and she could not free it. She was frightened at the intensity of his gaze. And for what seemed ages he said no word. It was weird. Her flesh crept; and yet she felt as if she wanted to gather his head in her arms and mother him. She knew as well as anybody in the ship now that Val Orson's great ambition could scarcely be realized. Only the most unexpected stroke of luck could drive the *Kestrel* home to a record, and she believed that his piercing gaze so steadfastly fastened upon her was but a prelude to a characteristic bit of verbal cruelty just meant to make her cringe again. She was astonished at his tone when at last he spoke.

"Nancy, why in hell don't you hate me?"

She stammered. Lowered her eyes. Hung her head. Then met his gaze frankly and unafraid.

"I never hated you, Val. Why should I hate you now?"

"Then why aren't you afraid of me, hey?"

"I don't know why," she said, with a little, catchy laugh. "Unless it's because— Oh, I can't tell you, Val. I was frightened of you at first, but I'm not any more. I'm sorry for you sometimes. But not afraid."

"Damn queer!" he growled. "Every God damn critter in this ship is either afraid of me or hates me; most of 'em both."

"Are you forgetting I'm your wife, Val? Why should I, how could I hate you, or be afraid of you?

I could not be happy, if you were not so worried."

Orson closed his eyes. His grip tightened upon Nancy's hand, and he chuckled. She laid her head on his chest and settled down to watch patiently over another brief sleep. She heard him chuckling words:

"That's right, Nancy. I forgot all about the wife part. Why would you be afraid o' me? Good girl, Nancy. Damn good girl."

Men grumbled more, but the work went on. If they were not utterly to starve to death, the ship must be sailed home, or another ship must be hailed for provisions. One alternative remained: they might compel the captain to put into a nearer port for stores. But that, as most men knew, was not as simple an alternative as it sounded. So the gangs pumped, or tramped drearily at the heels of the mates from one bit of gear to another, while the equatorial sun blazed down, and the water in the tanks grew red and stinking. The paint fell from the bulwarks and houses in great flakes. It revealed the ancient glories of the old ship pitifully. Teak and mahogany paneling marred and disguised with cheap paint. A bulwark panel fell out, and uncovered the original panel beneath, of bright wood, lined with gold, a golden kestrel in flight at each corner. Orson went down to see that, and as he stood there, gazing at the faded beauty that was once his ship's, men might have had their will with him for all he seemed to care. In appearance, Val

Orson was many leagues, and many years, distant from the present.

On the day that the ship came the nearest to any land before striking in for her port, the men came aft again and demanded that he put in for stores.

"You demand this, do you?" Orson said, standing at the head of the ladder, gazing gloomily down at the upturned faces.

"Yes, we do. There ain't food enough to take us home, and we can't work without grub. Pumpin' day and night month arter month." The bosun headed the crowd now, and he it was who spoke.

"Men, there's food enough to see us into port," Orson replied. "I can live on it, my officers are living on the same as you get. If a ship heaves in sight and it doesn't hinder me I may ask for provisions. That'll do. Lay for'ard."

"Bli'me, we'll take the bleedin' boats and quit!" screamed Tredway, and Groves angrily clapped a hand over the little rascal's indiscreet mouth. Orson smiled. Stepping inside the chartroom, he took a fire ax from the beckets and coolly walked down the poop ladder toward the men.

They broke before his menacing advance, ran forward, ready to dodge whichever way he came with the ax. Val Orson never looked so much like destruction as then. Men trembled, wondering who he was coming after first. Mr. Martin trembled on the poop, for this looked like the end of peace.

Orson stopped beneath the boat gallows. Once,

twice he struck great overarm blows with the ax, and stove in the port boat. Once, twice, and the starboard boat was useless. There were only the small boats now, one upturned on the forward house, dried out and unseaworthy, the other upturned across the cabin trunk, beyond possibility of use without connivance of the people aft.

"Pump or sink, my lads. Suit yourselves," he shouted back at them as he went up the ladder.

CHAPTER XXV

MUTINY

THE tobacco was all gone. Orson sent the bad news forward by the two injured men in Nancy's hospital, now sound and well. Those men scarcely realized the grim importance of the message they carried. Each was far too much concerned in leaving the snug quarters they had occupied so long, to be troubled about a bit of tobacco. They thanked Nancy as they left the cabin, and one of them promised to make her a ship in a bottle.

Forward, after the men had returned to their duty, the hands seemed to split definitely into two parties, quite distinct from the division of three gangs which had long been the rule because of the necessity to keep the pumps going. Sails and Chips, Godwin and Norris, and the two recently healed men hung together; two of the men who, besides Godwin and Norris had been chosen as helmsmen, hovered on the fringes of both camps; and the bosun and all the rest of the hands forward kept pretty much to themselves, with Groves again in eminence, and Tredway playing mouthpiece.

As long as the ship was worked, nobody aft took much apparent notice of what the men did with their spare time. Orson was obviously content if his

vessel were kept free of water and sailed at the top of her capacity. The mates had ceased to worry over such things as keeping paint and bright work in shape. They saw to the essential gear, mindful of their own welfare, keen to see that the ship's progress never was checked because of faulty service, chafed ropes, or broken sheaves. Mr. Martin had felt aggrieved for a long time at the condition of his ship. Any good chief mate would have felt grieved. But that phase had passed. Both Martin and Ringlin now considered they would count the voyage well accomplished if they got home without getting mixed up in a physical encounter with some of the men. Not that either of them would shirk the encounter if it must come; but Mr. Martin had outgrown his youth, and while he gladly manhandled a man if necessary for the wellbeing of the ship and discipline, he had but a very slight taste for getting tangled up in a serious outbreak.

"Just the same, Mister, you'll keep your eyes peeled," he told Ringlin. "Don't ever let a crowd come up here, unless to work, then call your men by name."

"Not much fear they'll be wanted on the poop," Ringlin returned. "It's a cinch the Old Man won't take sail off her; and we can handle the spanker sheets or brails ourselves. I wouldn't let a man up here anyhow, unless Orson was here himself. Not that I believe anything's going to be started. It's

gone too far. If anything 'd ha' been going to break, it 'ud busted a long time ago. Too much talkee-talkee in that crowd."

"Norris beat up a man to-day, didn't he? It ain't all just talkee-talkee, my son," Martin remarked as he went below.

Two nights later, Orson stood at the poop rail, waiting for a star for observation. His sextant lay on the skylight. He leaned with one elbow on the rail, his free hand in his pocket. Suddenly out of the blackness of the deep waist something flew past his face, just flicking him, but with a sting. It crashed against the mizzenmast, and fell upon the skylight, going straight through the glass and on to the saloon table. Swift as the flight of the missile had been, Orson matched it for swiftness. Before the tinkling of broken glass had ceased, he had whipped out his pistol, and fired instinctively at the spot the missile came from. Something was hit.

A man sobbed out a curse, and then there was silence again; except for a shuffling sort of sound which might have been either bare feet, or the dragging of a body, or simply the chafing of buntlines over the foresail.

Nancy came running up, all fluttery. Close behind her was Martin. Ringlin stood in his tracks where he had been when the shot was fired.

"Oh, what is it, Val?" cried Nancy. Orson took

her arm with unexpected gentleness, turning her toward the companionway.

"Nothing 's the matter. Go to bed, girl. You'll get cold."

"But I heard a shot!"

"I shot at a rat, that's all. Go to bed."

"Then that was the rat I found on the table, beneath the skylight," Mr. Martin growled, slipping something into his pajama pocket.

"Maybe so," Orson said shortly. "I heard the glass go. Go below, Nancy."

Nancy went, obediently. As she stepped into the stairway she murmured as if to herself, though Orson heard every word:

"I thought they had shot you. I thought they had shot you."

"Here's what was on the table, sir," said Martin, producing a fourteen-inch iron belaying pin. "What d'you want to do about it? Did you plug the man, sir?"

"We'll know in the morning," Orson returned. "I'll not do anything. Keep 'em guessing. Stick that pin in the mizzen rail and turn in. You'll be called soon enough when you're wanted."

Mr. Martin exchanged looks of resignation with Ringlin as he went below. That was all the thanks a man got for being right on the job when trouble seemed about to burst! Oh, well.

Orson waited for his star, and got it. So far as any one might observe, he had already forgotten

that flying missile out of the blackness. If he gave a thought to the possible result of his snap shot, it was not evident. Ringlin took the time for the star sight at the chronometer, then returned to his watch pacing, while Orson worked up the sight and carried forward his position. The wheel was relieved when relief was due; and the man who came aft to take it trotted along the lee side of the poop without a look inside the chartroom.

In the morning Orson was still on deck, and when the watches were changed at eight bells for the forenoon watch, and both mates were up, a quiet tallying of noses went on from aft.

"Tredway!" Mr. Martin grunted. Tredway was missing.

"Shall I fetch him out, sir?" Ringlin asked.

"Leave him alone. If he isn't dead he'll need attention pretty soon. Let him come for it. I'll see that he gets it."

Orson's utter incuriosity concerning the rather grim event of the night spread ferment through the ship. The men went about their work in silence, yet all of them shot furtive glances aft whenever they came on deck. The men who, by turn, went to the galley for the poor rations, stepped inside while waiting for the doctor to dish up; and faces could almost always be seen framed in the galley ports. The men who came to the helm seemed ever expectant of questions; they went forward when their trick was up as silent and puzzled as the rest. They

were not asked a question; they had nothing to tell their very anxious shipmates when they were surrounded with questions.

One sultry day when the sea was all mottled and the breeze all broken up by thunder squalls which deluged the ship with rain and drove her groaning along with foam to her catheads, the cabins were stuffy and the skylights and ports kept shut to ward off the thrashing rain. Needing no orders, the men stretched water catches, and replenished the rusty, stinking tanks with sparkling fresh rain water. Nancy stayed on deck. She found the heat and stuffiness unbearable below. She looked very small, and very lonely, huddled there in a corner of the poop rail, wrapped up in an old sou'wester and raincoat of Orson's. That watch Godwin and Norris shared the wheel tricks. And it was Godwin who, passing close by her, almost stopped short to stare into her face, so wan was she, so dark-eyed, so different from the fresh, bubbling Nancy of old. Godwin seemed about to speak to her, daring what might come of it. She smiled at him, then walked away, and he went aft to the wheel. She returned to her corner as soon as he had gone, for it was the only corner where she could wedge herself securely. Orson stood in the weather corner, and he was not wearing a companionable aspect.

Godwin received the course, and steering instructions, from Norris, and apparently that was all that passed between them; but when Norris in his turn

passed Nancy on his way forward, he looked keenly into her face, too. He did not pause; but when he reached the forecastle he turned as he went inside for his five minutes' spell, and stood there gazing long and intently at the motionless figure of Orson behind the weather-cloth.

There was a deep rumbling of portent in the forecastle that dog-watch. The pumps had sucked for once in a long while; the men were all below except the helmsman.

"Wot's the use carryin' on?" Tredway wanted to know. The little sea-lawyer sat like an evil oracle on a battered sea chest. His head was bound up. The captain's bullet had gone through his cheek; now he whistled as he talked, and the impediment only increased his virulence. On the rough table was the evening meal. Poor as it had been hitherto, this marked yet another milestone in the progress of starvation. The doctor had announced that the flour was gone; that the peas would be out after to-morrow; there were beans, but not many, and all the rice was then in the boiler for the cabin supper.

"If it blew a gale right behind us we can't make port in less than a week," Godwin put in.

"And that girl's starving to death," growled Norris. "If ever I saw weakness and hunger, it's in her eyes."

"Aye, and many's the time we heard her cry out, ain't it, Tom?" said Ike.

"Said he wos a-hurtin' of her once, and her eyes

showed it when she come to dress our hurts. Like a blessed angel she wos to us," growled Tom.

"Then it's time something was done other than chatter," put in Groves with relish. He glanced at Norris and Godwin, as if very well content now they had expressed themselves. Old Sails was near the door, smoking scraps of tobacco mixed with rope-yarns, nodding from time to time as a word was spoken that was in tune with his thoughts.

"There may be a ship at any time," Godwin remarked. "It's mutiny, I suppose you all know, to attack the master and mates and force them to sail the ship as we want?"

"Yus, God stiffen yuh!" whistled Tredway, jumping up and shaking his fist under Godwin's nose. "Yus, and our gutses hollers for real grub. Bli'me, you ain't proper *wiv* us yet, you and yer maybe's!"

Godwin coolly knocked the little man's fist aside.

"Only for the girl, neither Norris nor I would listen to you a minute. But she looks ill. She can't stand the racket like men."

"You're too anxious about the girl," said Groves, evilly. "We want all hands of one mind, so let it pass. But hands off Nancy when we strike! That goes for you all."

"Better say what yuh got in mind an' let's get on with it," cut in the sailor who rarely said anything. "Proper windy, all o' you are."

"How about you, Sails?"

"I won't hinder ye, anyhow," Sails replied. "I'm hungry too."

"Bosun, and Chips?"

"They won't butt in neither. Doctor says he'll shut hisself up in the galley and lay doggo."

"Then," Groves said, "Norris and Godwin, are you with us or not? Guard the door somebody!"

Norris laughed contemptuously. Godwin stared around the crowd as if he enjoyed the situation, although Tredway thumbed a murderously sharpened knife in the doorway. He looked like one of Long John Silver's nightmares, did Tredway, with his bandaged jowl and all.

"We're with all hands for the reason stated, and for no other," Godwin snapped. "In any case we insist that nothing be done until this time to-morrow. We're in the track of ships now, and ought to sight one any time. Let Groves tell all hands just what he means to do when he strikes. That's more to the point. We've waited so long, another day more or less—"

"Yes, what good's it going to do us now? Will hammering Orson give us more to eat?" Norris cut in harshly. Neither he nor Godwin was in love with Groves or his kidney. Tredway sprang into the circle, waving his wicked knife, screaming:

"Less mouths, more grub! Groves, make 'em say 'ow they're 'eading. Bli'me, I fink they're both dodgin' Pompey!" By which the little guttersnipe meant to imply, in remote sailorese, that Godwin

and Norris were marking time. And the crowd were not friendly to anybody dodging Pompey.

Threatening gestures were in the air. Old Sails slipped out on deck, a bit uncertain. Groves was on his feet, swiftly seeking in the faces about him some import of leadership in fact. Groves wanted to be, and intended to be leader eventually; but he wanted somebody else to be the butt goat in the front rank of the first assault. Norris and Godwin closed together; and Tom and Ike seemed inclined to close back to back with them. And the first battle apparently was ready to be joined right there among the mutineers when, from the forecastle ladder, just beside the door, Sails roared out in the full enthusiasm of hungry hope:

"Sail ho! Ship on weather bow, standing to th' west'ard!"

CHAPTER XXVI

ACHIEVEMENT

Not since the *Kestrel* was off the Horn had another ship hove in sight. Now everybody was on deck, getting a glimpse of a fine shiny four-masted barque, all glittering with harbor polish and new tarred rigging; a thing of majestic loveliness in her dress of new sails and jewels of burnished brass. She was beating toward the stiffer ordeal through which the *Kestrel* had recently come. The *Kestrel* sailed before a fair sparkling breeze which grew hourly, blowing her fair for home, a white bone in her teeth, a creaming trail of foaming bubbles at her rusty sides, a wide, straight wake astern.

"Here she comes, out'ard bound," cried an old Limehouse rat, still able to thrill to the sight of a splendid ship; particularly when that splendid ship was going to be stopped to give him food.

"Aye, clean pannikins and rusty throats. And here we go, rusty pannikins and throats parched clean," rejoined a shipmate. It was easy for that sea-weary crew to bring out all the moldy old sea jokes used when an outward bounder was met by a homeward bound ship. And at that moment, had Val Orson twigged a finger to order a signal to be flown, never a thought of mutiny would have lived

a moment aboard the flying *Kestrel*. Sailors have notoriously short memories for hurts, and nobly simple minds. At least, the real sailors have.

Steamships are as likely to have a crew of grocers' clerks, or plasterers' laborers as anything; such as they cannot be expected to have simple minds, or that largeness of soul which forgets a grievance when the cause is dead. But aboard the *Kestrel,* men who a moment before were itching to turn pirate and scuttle the ship with much cutting of throats, now that hungry bellies seemed certain to be fed forgot all about mutiny and saw only what every deep-water sailorman sees in an ocean meeting. All, that is, except Groves and Tredway. Tredway was but a bit of man anyhow, and Groves never had been a man, though he'd been a parson. Had he been a man, he'd have remained a parson, for that's a man's job.

"Ain't that th' big *Khedivieh?*" one wanted to know.

"Looks like her. Noo larst year, wuzn't she? See her out in Sydney, I did. I wuz in the *Fermoppily.*"

"You in th' flyin' *Thermopylæ?* Wot was you? Galley swab?"

So the banter went, the big fourmaster came across the *Kestrel's* bows. The officers on the poop were gazing at her while taking care that their own duty came first. Nancy stood at the poop rail, her eyes all alight with pleasure at the glorious sight.

Her face was pale and wan, and there was something about her figure which seemed to hint at low vitality where all should have been sparkling, buoyant life. But her face was alight because her eyes saw beauty. If she ever took her eyes away from that tall fourmaster slashing athwart the *Kestrel's* course, it was to glance at Val Orson, inside the chartroom.

Nancy only glanced there. She was fascinated by that great new steel sailing ship, power and grace in steel and canvas; never knowing that the big *Khedivieh* represented the last dying blow of a fight against steam. Had she known that, perhaps she might have seen tragedy rather than beauty out there ahead. But now she saw only loveliness; sparkling blue and dazzling white; foaming bow and glinting brass; and, moreover, as soon as the signal went up there would be a transfer of stores and contentment aboard the *Kestrel.*

But Orson made no signal. The four-master slipped fast down to the westward. Men stopped joking. They moved aft. Mr. Martin edged nearer the chartroom, and Ringlin took his eyes from the big barque to glance forward, for the men were muttering and moving.

"Will you signal her for stores, sir?" Mr. Martin asked with respect.

Orson still pored over his figures. From time to time he put out his head and glanced aloft, around at the sky, at the long rolling seas that bore his

ship onward. The fourmaster was well to leeward now. Men approached the *Kestrel's* poop ladder. Orson came out of the chart-house. He was haggard, and his mouth looked as if he were grimly aware of a life-and-death contest awaiting him around the next corner. He had a scribbling pad in his hand. Men, thinking he had just doped out the signal flags, trooped joyously near. He looked again at the pad. At the sail trim. At the sky astern. Everywhere but at the ship ahead.

"The record is six days and eleven hours from this position, Mister. Take a drag on that foretopsail sheet," he said. "They can last another six days!"

"A drag on the—" Martin started to shout, when the onset came. It came as if, like a river in spate, it was independent of all human will. Martin was at the poop ladder, in the act of shouting the order. He was rolled under by a tidal wave of oxlike human anger. Martin was saved to his wife and family by that first onset being oxlike. He fell beneath the port ladder, and the tide rolled over him. Ringlin ran to the skipper's side. Orson stood there like a rock, glaring at the oncoming crowd. He seemed as coldly contemptuous of them as he had ever been. He had no weapon. He stood there, pencil and pad in hand, facing that mob which charged up two ladders at once and rolled over their own leaders in charging.

"Stop that ship fer grub!" screeched a voice.

"Let me talk to him reasonably!" broke in Norris' voice.

"Reason, my neck!" countered another. Then up the top steps leaped a bunch of men thrust forward by Groves. Tredway lurked a bit behind, as always; but he wielded a murderously pointed knife. He thumbed it while the ladder was being rushed. Groves, in the open now that he had fooled others to fill the front rank, thrust up the ladder armed with the broad ax of old Chips himself.

Godwin and Norris had been among the first to get to the ladder. They were as determined as anybody to make Orson stop the ship for stores. They had not intended murder. They were determined to make the mad driving skipper of the *Kestrel* realize that he had others to think about besides himself. Now they found themselves, by the cunning of Groves, facing Orson on his own poop, and, as bound to happen with any decent man in like circumstances, they didn't know how to act. They were no movie picture pirates. No fiction bad men, but they acted just as any man, taking ninety per cent of any crowd, would act.

They hesitated, looking from Orson to Nancy, mutely asking guidance. Nancy looked terrified at the abrupt invasion.

Orson stared at the invaders as if they were queer sea beasts hove aboard by an upheaval.

Tredway came to the top. The little guttersnipe was hideous in his bandages and rage. His knife

was ground to a stiletto edge and point. But still the little man cared for his own skin. He was creeping up, behind another man, Norris, when Orson uttered his ultimatum. Then, though it takes longer to tell, Tredway shoved through Norris' legs, rose to a half crouch, and thrust upward at Orson's breast with his knife as Groves raised his ax behind him.

Orson fell. Tredway's knife entered between his ribs. It was all so swiftly done that mates and men were staggered. Remember, this was a sudden attack by otherwise decent sailormen led to rebellion by hardship and bad example.

Tredway rose to full height as Orson sagged to his knees; to a heap. Groves brought his ax down with a grunt of purpose. Orson's head it was aimed at. Orson's head fell under Tredway's knife thrust as Tredway's head rose triumphantly, and Tredway's head met the ax in full sweep.

"Q-u-u-unkkk!"

Martin fought from under a pile of men who didn't want to kill him but meant to keep him from helping Orson. Ringlin's pistol refused to shoot just at the instant when Groves tried to split Orson's skull. The young second mate had quality. He knew a crisis when it faced him. The moment Tredway's head fell apart under Groves' ax, Ringlin pulled the trigger twice without result; and in a second more his pistol, butt, trigger guard, and cylinder end smashed into Groves' face like a pile-

driver, and the once reverend pitched forward to bury his own ruined face in the fatal débris of Tredway.

Men stopped short, awed by such swift tragedy. Only a few of them, if any, had meant to carry matters to the point of death, and here lay Orson, if not dead then apparently dying; there lay Tredway, as dead as ever a man could be, a silly grin on his face matching the split in his skull with hideous humor. Groves might crawl a fathom away, but that was about as far as he would be able to go in this life.

Norris and Godwin paused right at Orson's prostrate form. They had never meant to see things go so far. They had meant to see that Nancy Prouse got the food so obviously necessary to her well-being, and had honestly meant to bring about that end by any means in their power, but they had never dreamed of stark murder. However, since murder was done, they would carry out the plan, and one look at Nancy's face strengthened them in their resolve. Nancy looked as if she had met the eye of utter doom. Three men, who had been closest to Groves in all his plotting except Tredway, shoved past Norris and Godwin and stooped to drag out Orson. They would see that he at least was where they could make use of him either as hostage or mouthpiece. Godwin lent a hand. They were dragging Orson to the ladder. Men piled upon Ringlin and Martin, milling, pummelling awkward

in a life or death fight. And like a she-cat kept from her litter, Nancy leaped into the mêlée, kneeling beside Orson, taking his head on her knee and blazing up at the amazed, milling men who believed they were doing her a service.

"Little lady, let us relieve you of him. He shall stop that ship for stores," Norris said, trying gently to remove her hands from Orson's head. She looked up at him, with dumb horror in her eyes.

"You have murdered my husband! Leave him with me!" she breathed. And as if there were nothing on earth to matter now, Nancy sat on the deck, drew Orson's head upon her lap, and tremblingly unfastened his clothes to get at the wound.

The big fourmaster drove on into the sunset. Mr. Martin dragged out his pistol, and fired one shot in the air. Then, sure that it would shoot, he backed the crowd off the poop and Ringlin drove the attack home with his own useless weapon.

"Hands to the pumps!" he roared, boisterously. Young Ringlin was a juvenile at heart still. He saw the men on the run, and made them run faster. And the gang whose turn it was, went silently to the pumps.

There was no song.

CHAPTER XXVII

ABORNING

ORSON lay so still that Nancy was frightened. At her command, the steward brought up water and bandages from the medicine chest. She had meant to attend to his hurt there on deck; but he remained so stark and rigid she was about to call to the mate for assistance to carry him to his room. Then Orson showed signs of life. His eyelids quivered. The deep lines about his lips twitched. His strong face, suddenly so gray and worn, was twisted in a spasm of pain, and blood ran over Nancy's fingers at the wound. But a ghost of his old time smile hovered about him; that smile which had so much in it of indulgent superiority, almost a sneer in itself. His eyes opened, and flashed quick glances around. The bodies of Tredway and Groves lay where they had fallen; fairly in his range of sight as Nancy supported his head.

"Who in hell stopped 'em?" he asked weakly. "Who was soft enough to miss a chance at me like that?"

Nancy suddenly let her head droop. She held him fast, and began crying softly. A sort of whimsical surprise chased the ghostly smile from his face, and he tried to turn so that he might see her.

"Oh, Val!" she murmured, "I thought they had killed you!"

"And you're cryin' because they didn't?" Even in dire extremity Orson must thrust in the goad and watch her cringe. But Nancy was full of her own thoughts now; she murmured on, paying no heed to his sarcasm.

"You mustn't die now, Val. You must get well. Our son will need you—"

"What?" Orson almost sat upright, and his exclamation ended in a groan of agony. But he stared hard into her wet face, and saw therein rosy color for all the distress; there was gentle pride there, too. And Orson recalled that mock marriage ceremony which had so easily satisfied simple Nancy.

"Good God!" he gasped.

"Why, Val, aren't you glad?"

Without a trace of sarcasm, Orson told her all about that marriage. All the rosy color, all the happiness faded from her face, leaving her wide-eyed and pale. Her eyes never left his until he ceased talking and lay back with eyes shut again.

"You can't mean that! Val, you're only joking!"

"I wish I was, girl," he muttered. "If I was I'd enjoy the joke, for there's damned little prospect of many more jokes in my life."

He lay so still she feared he was dead. But he was thinking. He remembered those days when Nancy sang. And among the hardships of those bitterest days she had never failed to fill the part

of a real wife in service, comfort or bravely smiling face. She was proud to be the mother of his child. She was sure of giving him a son. Of all the many light loves he had trifled with, Nancy Prouse alone had taken it for granted that he meant to be honest with her. She accepted the situation once she saw it was inevitable, believing in him; and, believing in him, she had never fallen down in one essential of decent wifehood. And now he was just about three parts dead; the ship could not reach port in less than six days, drive as he might, even supposing he retained life enough to drive. Orson did not believe he could live two days, much less six.

Of all the women he ever knew, Nancy, perhaps the simplest soul born, was of that fiber which makes strongest for the letter and form of legitimacy. Once satisfied as to the form, Nancy could forget forever the fashion of her mating. But this blow that had fallen on her, this very real upheaval of all her beliefs and hopes, left her stunned. She sat there on the deck, with his head in her arms, staring glassily out to sea where the westering sun turned to gilded ivory the vanishing sails of that fine big fourmaster. In all the visible ocean around, there was no speck save that.

"Val!" she whispered. "Val! Please don't joke with me. Tell me—"

Suddenly he opened his eyes again. His hand gripped her wrist so that it hurt.

"Look at that!" he rasped, pointing at the hid-

eously broken head of Groves, the smashed features frozen in death into a mask of devilish mirth, grotesque, horrible. "Could that have ever said a prayer that'd be heard? Nancy girl, I hope you can believe that I feel sorry. I never did before over a woman. I haven't a lot of breath left. Do as I tell you. Don't argue. Tell the mate to have a cot fixed up right here. Here where I can see what's doing. Tell the steward to bring me my rifle and some cartridges. Hurry up."

His tone was as metallic as of old. The mate and steward fixed him up, on a cot lashed to the mizzenmast, the head end raised so that he might command a sweep of the ship from the poop rail to the jib-boom. The gang at the pumps finished their spell while the cot was being fastened. And Orson hauled himself onto it, grimly, with set teeth, and eyes that held exquisite pain. A clear, lovely night was stealing over the sea; stars winked in the east as the sun slumbered in the west; there was a healthful, caressing breeze, and the *Kestrel* sailed on for her port.

"Mister, make those men keep her pumped free," Orson told the mate harshly. "I want to hear the pumps suck from here, and if ever I miss the sound I'll pepper somebody if the kick of the gun kicks my lights out. And—" he whispered, his breath coming in choked sobs—"make the ship travel. Make her go!"

Nancy settled down to watch her man. Men

muttered that Val Orson was proving himself superhuman. There he lay, his grim face all pallid, and his lips gray, seemingly about to slip his earthly cable. But he had a rifle alongside of him right in what might easily be his death bed; and his cry was, still, as it had been for months, "Sail the ship! Make her travel!"

"Batty about records!" men said.

"Never mind, we'll get full bellies all the sooner," others would say.

"Wot'll 'e do wiv them dead blokes?" the ancient Limehouser muttered.

"Maybe dump 'em, now there's nobody to say a prayer over 'em!" a man responded gloomily.

At eight bells the pumps stopped. Men had two-hour spells since the finer weather set in, keeping the water at a negotiable level. Two minutes after the clank of the rods ceased, the sharp crack of a small bore rifle echoed along the decks and men who were next on turn leaped outside in panic.

"Keep the pumps sucking! Don't ever stop!" roared Ringlin, almost dancing with frenzy because it was in his watch that Orson found it necessary first to fire a shot.

The pumping had never sounded so monotonous. At midnight Orson caught the coat of the second mate.

"Get a couple of hands and dump the two stiffs," he whispered.

"Sew them up, sir?"

"Chuck 'em over. Don't waste time on them."

Ringlin told Mr. Martin about it. Said the Old Man was madder than ever about breaking that record.

"Mad as he was, he always had a bit o' service said over the others," Ringlin grumbled. "Now he says, just dump 'em."

"Then what're you waiting for? Dump 'em," growled Martin.

Men complained, as they must. Being driven all the voyage to set up a record which none of them believed possible, half starved, worked silly at the endless pumping grind, led to set up a mutiny by leaders who proved just as vulnerable as common men and far more so than the man they mutinied against, now that port was within measurable distance, and the driving hellion of a skipper lay close to the door of death, they were driven still and harder than ever.

"Crazy as a bedbug!"

"Gorn proper mad now, 'e 'ave!"

"Mad, yes, but the madman's got guts!" Norris muttered.

"I hope he lives, but he can't," Godwin rejoined.

"And s'pose he lives. Wot'll we git done to us?" inquired the sailor who rarely said much. "Mutiny's a hangin' job, ain't it?"

"That's in the future, but stopping the pumps is a shooting job in the present. Whose next spell is it. Hop to it."

Day and night Val Orson lay there speaking only the briefest word, then only in a whisper. Nancy watched him in awed silence. He ate nothing; drank a little water often; seemed to doze for long intervals, yet his eyes would instantly open if sound or sense implied to him that the ship might do better. When he seemed most like death, he would take Nancy's hand and hold it tightly; then his teeth closed upon his under lip and started the blood trickling. Once, at the end of the fifth day since the uprising, he sighed heavily, gave Nancy a wan smile, and swooned away. She brought Martin in swift alarm. And between them they brought Orson back to earth.

"Let us put you in your bunk, sir," Martin said. "There's no chance of beating that record now. You'll be more easy in bed."

"The record I want is still possible. Drive her!" Orson smiled weakly.

At the change of watches on the sixth morning, young Ringlin tried his luck. He too had acquired a measure of admiration for his driving skipper.

"You can depend on us, sir. Martin and I can drive her. We'll do it, too. Won't you turn in, sir? You're hurt badly, d'ye know."

"Keep her going, and tell me the moment you make the land." That was all. The last hour of the old record was sped by, and the land was still beneath the horizon. Men knew. The whisper went around the ship. The mad skipper was hope-

lessly behind all possibility of that record he coveted, yet he still drove the old ship as if the passage was just starting. Toward evening, Martin reported:

"Just made out the lightship, sir. Will you take a tug, or anchor in the outer harbor?"

"Get out the code book. Make this signal. Keep it flying, and keep the ship going." Orson held out a piece of paper with a signal message written down. Nancy sat in a weary little heap by his cot; she dozed, but aroused at the report of land.

Past the lightship flew the *Kestrel,* still piling up the foam at her bows. Men at the pumps, and others standing idle, discussed that signal that the mate sent up.

"Doctor?" one surmised.

"Police, more like!" growled one less easy in his mind.

"Maybe it's only our number."

"Here's one bloke as won't stop to see, if the shore comes near enough to jump! Wonder what he's goin' to do?"

Aft, the mates grew uneasy. There was no order yet about preparing the anchors for letting go. Though the land was now in plain view, the harbor open ahead, the ship still roared through the darkling seas under full sail.

A pilot boat bobbed on the water ahead.

"You'll take a pilot, sir?" enquired Martin.

"Stop for nobody! Sail over him if he gets in the way."

A tug steamed out, puffing hopefully around to head off the ship. Martin held his tongue. The *Kestrel* bore down until the tug was forced to sheer aside and put on steam to avoid being sunk. The faintest flicker of a grin danced over Orson's face as the tug-boatmen's language floated after the flying ship, pungent and free.

"We'll be inside in fifteen minutes, sir. Start getting sail off her?" Mr. Martin knew there was bound to be a smash. He felt it in his bones.

"D'ye think anybody's taken our signal and telegraphed it in?" Orson panted.

"They waved from the lightship, sir!"

"Take in royals and flying jib, then. Strip her to topsails and inner-jib. Never mind pumping any more. And steer for that old lumber dock up the river. Don't take any notice of anybody."

Men about the harbor still tell of the day the flying *Kestrel* roared up the bay, through the narrows, and into the river under sail. Doing twelve knots they said she was, with a big crew of men darting about her decks and rigging as if possessed of seven devils of work. Nancy found herself pushed aside; Orson summoned some secret reserve of endurance, and stood at the rail conning the ship. As wharf after wharf slid past, and the river stream grew tranquil, the crew began to cling to the landward side of the ship, estimating the jumping distance, with always an eye open for that grim figure at the poop rail. Orson's gaze was fixed upon a

line of sheds ahead, with an old dock at the end. It seemed that there were men standing there. As soon as it was certain they were men, Orson staggered aft, sent the helmsman away, and took the wheel himself.

"Let-go everything and clew up," he gasped, and the mates ran to the gear, sure that the order was too late. It was. Orson steered his big ship in from midstream. She slid alongside, stuck her jib-boom through the shed and broke it off, and while her sails were still fluttering, she crashed to a stop with her golden *Kestrel* soaring above the broken timbers of the old wharf.

"Never mind lines. She's in the mud. See if that's a parson there on the dock. It ought to be," Orson panted, sitting heavily down on the wheel grating, while Nancy ran to his side with a cry, and every man in the ship except Godwin and Norris and the two mates leaped ashore and ran as if from the plague.

A clean looking old clergyman climbed over the rail, and came straight to the poop.

"Your signal for a priest was sent to the Mission, Captain," he said. "Is some poor fellow dying? Is it himself, miss?" he asked, looking into Nancy's face.

"Don't waste words!" Orson rasped. "Marry us, quick!"

The clergyman was a practical man. He beckoned to another man who had come aboard with him, and meanwhile opened his prayer book.

Martin and Ringlin stood there with bared heads, Godwin and Norris came to the top of the poop ladder, looking on curiously. While the parson was swiftly tying the knot with a real sailor's knot that was safe enough even for simple Nancy, the other man was opening the medical satchel of an experienced surgeon. So when Mr. Martin, and Ringlin had affixed their signatures as witnesses to Nancy's legal papers, the parson stepped aside and let in the doctor, while poor Nancy cried softly, certain now that her man had lost whatever chance for life he might have had simply to reach port in time to put her right with the world.

"He will get well, won't he, doctor?" she begged.

"Well, little lady, he ought not to; but he's tough, and I wouldn't tell the undertaker yet. But he'll need care."

"Oh, I'll take care of him! He's just got to get well now. He must."

"Then he most probably will," the doctor said gravely, after one keen look into Nancy's eyes.

Mr. Martin and Ringlin, with Godwin and Norris, put out shore lines. It was a long job for the small gang, and the dock was dark.

"Do you mind if we stay by the ship, sir?" Godwin asked when the work was done.

"Gluttons, ain't you?" growled Martin. Ringlin chuckled.

"Not exactly," grinned Godwin. "You see, Norris and I joined this hooker to see how tough Val

Orson was. We've seen. He's as tough as they said. And we want to see if he's tough enough to recover. Isn't that it, Norris?"

"That's about it," agreed Norris. "Anyhow, we surely hope he is."

"Then stay. If sailors want to stand by Val Orson, he's sure made a record he never knew about!" answered Mr. Martin.

THE END

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